UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CAUGHT IN THE MIXED MESSAGES OF EVALUATION: TEACHERS EVALUATING STUDENT WRITING

by Kathy Sanford

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1997

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DEGREE: DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1997

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Caught in the Mixed Messages of Evaluation: Teachers Evaluating Student Writing" submitted by Katherine Jane Sanford in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Abstract

Over a two year period, this study has examined the processes of evaluation and the reasons that educators cite for imposing evaluative measures on students. The practices and insights of twenty high school students and five of their high school teachers have informed this study through observation, informal and formal interviews and the participant observation of the researcher. Each of the teachers used a variety of writing assignments in their classes to assess their students' progress. Their participation has enabled an in-depth consideration of underlying beliefs and assumptions that teachers bring to student evaluation as well as a recognition of the dilemmas facing teachers and students relating to the purposes of evaluation. This study of multiple perspectives concerning issues surrounding evaluative practices and beliefs served to inform my own evaluative practices when I returned to teaching in a school setting.

This research is written in nine sections. The first two sections of my research set an autobiographical context and include my own memories and experiences of evaluation as well as the research questions. Section three examines the assumptions of evaluation held by teachers in an educational setting. This is followed in section four by a discussion of the dilemmas faced by educators as they attempt to balance their own beliefs and assumptions of evaluation with the demands of a greater educational community. Section five examines the struggle for clarity of meaning for evaluation despite the slipperiness of language, and section six examines issues of power that define and

confine our development as teachers and students through means of evaluation. Section seven examines both negative and positive aspects of gaps -- gaps that distance and silence, gaps that interrupt and give pause to our practices, and gaps that create openings and new spaces in which ideas regarding evaluation may grow. The final two sections represent an attempt to incorporate my newfound understandings in my own classroom situation following the research experience.

This research indicates the need for major revisioning of the role of assessment and evaluation in classrooms, a role which acknowledges the importance of relationship between teachers and their students. Opportunities to hear multiple voices can be created as teachers come to consider the value of educational relationships with their students. Acts of evaluation make lasting impacts on both evaluators and evaluatees; therefore, evaluation must be considered more thoughtfully by all participants in education. Evaluation needs to become a major part of the learning process rather than the final act imposed on the products of learning.

Acknowledgements

The words and ideas of this dissertation have been woven by many hands and many voices. Through collaborative connections this dissertation has taken shape and the writing continues to shape my words and thoughts. I am thankful for the willingness of so many people to help me with my work:

Tim Hopper, my best friend and partner, for his untiring enthusiasm and encouragement and gentle wise words,

jan jagodzinski, my supervisor and guide, who has opened many windows of possibility for me, and given me endless guidance,

Marg Iveson, who continues to ask many thoughtful questions and show genuine caring,

Joyce Bainbridge, who is always available to provide advice and encouragement,

Jim Parsons, who has provided ongoing advice,

Larry Beauchamp, whose voice is a continual reminder of practicality and reason,

David Dillon, who has been supportive in his questioning and accommodation of this project,

Gerry McConaghy, without whose patient ear I would not have created many of these ideas,

My teacher colleagues, Carolyn Lewis, Eugene Fedechko, Ann Manson, Nancy Fay and Chuck McDormand, whose words and actions have taught me and influenced me,

My students and friends at Nellie McClung School, Lisa Van Bui, Donita Davies, Alex Lieberman, Shevonne Brodeur, Sheena Mombourquette, Chawa Munthali, Tammy Ulmer, Tracey Arbuckle, Elaine Evans-Davies, Brandy Lehr, Kim Cameron, Aymee McKenna, Sarah Toane, Rose Chase, Lacey Lusk, Tessa Nally, Tara Dahl, Tarrin Bishop, Jessica McMinn, Brandy Halas, Katie Johnson, and who have inspired me and taught me about possibilities for women,

My children, Jessica, Matthew, Stephanie and Bryanda, who continually teach me the true meaning of education and whose love has sustained me throughout this project.

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1

Discovering my Re-Search Course through the Maze of Evaluation

My search has been discovered through a passage of time and place that has flowed, raced, lapsed its way along, wound its way through the personal and professional aspects of my life. My search for clear passage has become synonymous with my dissertation itself.

In the first year of my teaching I had occasion to accompany my students to a wildlife park in the area, to enable them to experience nature first-hand. As an enthusiastic beginning teacher should do, I spent an afternoon the previous week surveying the site and travelling the path myself. The path was clearly and regularly marked and I was confident that I could lead my group of students along it. I was prepared.

The day chosen for the trip turned out to be cloudy and rainy; somehow the way looked different. However, we were undaunted and after our picnic lunch, set off down the path. The markers along the path looked different, became more scarce, and as we walked, eventually disappeared altogether. I had to admit to myself, finally, that we were lost. I did not want to give myself away to my students and so we continued on. The sun had come out and the path was lovely. All of the students were having a good time. We encountered frogs, bullrushes, wildflowers, and even a cluster of buffalo.

We had been on our nature walk much longer than I had originally intended and some of the students were beginning to ask how much longer. I realized that if I did not find my way quickly, we would miss the bus rendezvous back to the school. Although I was feeling some distress at this time, we were on a powerline and I figured that it must lead soon to civilization. The students were in good spirits, the path was sloping gently downwards, and I continued to maintain my facade of confidence. We talked about the encounters we had had with the wildlife and I realized that, lost as we were, we would not have had these encounters on the "real" path.

Eventually the powerline trail led us back out of the wilderness and we were able to locate the bus rendezvous spot. As we waited for the bus to return, we all had popsicles and played in the park. We were late returning by almost two hours, but our experiences made the fieldtrip unique and

memorable. I learned later that the path was in the process of being remarked and the markers had been uprooted the day we were on the path. I was relieved that our departure from the path was not entirely due to my incompetence, however I did not regret the fact that we had been able to explore and create our own paths.

I recall this story as I reflect upon my own searches through my dissertation topic -- purposeful yet surprising. My way had been carefully marked out by others who had determined and travelled the path but along the way the markers have been removed and changed. However, this study has continued to seek its own course. And I have tramped along the beckoning path, becoming "a tramp of the obvious." (Freire, 1985, p. 171). And, "in playing the part of this vagrant, I have been learning how important the obvious becomes as the object of our critical reflection, and by looking deeply into it, I have discovered that the obvious is not always as obvious as it appears" (p. 171). Exploring away from the prescribed path, doubling back, and circling around have all given me awareness from which to hear, see, and feel, enabling me greater understanding of the subject of my study as I explore the oppressive structures that threaten to capture and imprison us in our classrooms.

The "Feel" of Evaluation

I have reached for the web of evaluation, attempting to know it by feeling its delicate softness. I have been startled by its deceptive strength and power, been distressed as I witnessed its capture of unsuspecting victims and become aware of the vastness of its connections. The sense of chaotic messiness I have felt about evaluation has taken on a distinct form in the intricacy and complexity of the web before me, elusive but powerful, connected to myriad other webs by further tightly woven strands. In attempting to impose a structure on the chaos that swirls around us, a structure has been created that threatens to capture me in its deadly web. I have struggled with both ideas and practices that I have encountered and believed in, attempting to avoid the powerful grasp of evaluation. The ideas that

began my struggles developed after I encountered the words of Nancie Atwell in her book In the Middle: Writing, Reading and Learning with Adolescents (1987).

Atwell's words changed forever my understanding of teaching language arts. In her book she revealed the transformation of her classroom and her "self" as she questioned her assumptions about teaching and created spaces for her students to make choices, experiment with their voices, and view themselves as writers and readers. Through Atwell's work I became acquainted with a variety of alternative approaches to the teaching of English language arts. Writing conferences (Graves, 1983; Murray, 1984) enable the teacher to engage in conversations with students to discuss aspects of the students' writing; response theory (Murray, 1985) considers the multiplicity of understandings possible through the reading of a text, dependant upon the reader's background, relationship with the writer, frame of mind, etc., and portfolio assessment (Elbow, 1994; Romano, 1994) gives students choices regarding the assignments to be selected for evaluation. I have given thought to the importance of respecting students' words, writing to learn and discover, and the "powerful creative current that can be transmitted among teenage writers" (Romano, 1987). I have come to recognize "passionate teaching" (Allen, 1996) as positive and energizing for teachers and students, enabling them to "find significance and direction, beauty and intimacy, in their lives" (Calkins, 1991).

My frustrations, however, have been multiplied by the images presented to me through my reading of classroom possibilities. I have time after time come soaring from the heights of self-exploration and discovery with my students to a crashing halt as I met the concrete wall of evaluation. I have returned, seeking assistance, to the texts that have inspired me, but have found none. I have asked myself, "Am I the only teacher struggling with evaluation?" I lacked the confidence I needed to openly ask the questions that finally, desperately, I came to pose in this research project. As Smith (1989) has suggested, "Through writing about educational practices some distance can be taken from

the clutter of actual situations, not so much to leave those situations behind but simply for the sake of seeing those situations more clearly" (p. 138). I have attempted throughout this research project to create some distance in order to search for possibilities that have not previously been obvious to me, to create awareness of issues that structure our evaluative practices in order to begin to change its oppressive nature.

My search and re-search has led me through many pathways and in many directions as I have sought my course. In searching for a place to situate myself and my research, I began in the classroom. My reflection, however, I found mirroring only myself. In order to extend my search, to locate new pathways, I began to seek voices that broadened my scope of understanding, to look reflexively upon myself. I attempted to examine my "self" and my practices through my actions, actions that gained meaning only in larger contexts. "The personal is most universal," suggests Gilligan (1993, p. 148). I found my own practices and beliefs became understandable as I shifted the focus from my own reflected *image* and began to examine my reflected *actions* through the lenses of other classrooms and other teachers, a critical process of increasing self-awareness and sensitivity to others.

This research project is poststructuralist and has been defined in three distinct but connected phases. The project began in the middle, with my desire to develop a better understanding of writing teachers' evaluative practices and the impact these practices have on students. My research questions outlined my direction and focus as I structured a research experience with teachers and students in an urban high school. **How can we as teachers come to better understand our purposes, both implicit and explicit, in writing comments on our students' work and the influence that our comments have on our students' future development of skills and attitudes? How can we develop evaluative practices that best enable us to guide our students to clearer understandings about reading, writing, and learning? What is the influence and impact on students of their teachers' responses to their writing?**

My year in the high school, using participant observation, formal and informal interviews, provided me with insights about five teachers' practices and beliefs, about twenty students' understandings of these teachers' evaluative practices and also caused me to consider my own beliefs and motivations. The year's study, rather than elucidating my research questions, further clouded them and created many other questions. These questions caused me to move in two directions, using Maxine Greene's words, to view both small and from a distance and big and close-up.

> To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviours from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face. (1995, p. 10)

My writing about teachers' beliefs and assumptions has come from several sources. Working with high school teachers and students, observing and discussing with them their teaching and learning has given me stories and views of several different yet similar worlds. My collection of data has been shaped by my own previous experiences and assumptions of teaching and of life which become intwined and inexorably linked. The stories of my own teaching experiences previous to my research collaboration with the teachers and students have emerged and some have made their way (marked in italics) into this writing. It is this collage of data which I attempt to unravel through my writing of assumptions and dilemmas of evaluation.

My desire to explore my research questions further caused me to augment the research methodologies I had used in the first phase of

the research. I became aware of the need to explore my own beliefs and values about evaluation, expanding my understanding through autobiographical writing -- seeing big. In addition, I was drawn to a more in-depth understanding of the political and systemic complexities connected with evaluative practices -- seeing small.

I extended my research into a second phase, a year of teaching in my own junior high classroom. I drew upon the insights and questions I had gained from my teacher and student research participants in my attempt to develop approaches to evaluation that reshaped the purposes of evaluation and the relationships that structured evaluation in the classroom. The second year brought deeper understanding to my research project, recognition of necessary directions and of the complexities embedded in the research questions. The second year began to create openings, spaces in which further questions grew. and suggested to me the need for further autobiographical writing.

The first autobiographical sections of my research project were the last ones to be written, the last ones to come to my conscious awareness, yet the ones to first influence and shape my practice and beliefs. Chronologically, the first part of the research (phase one) reached my conscious mind last, after the year working in the high school site (phase two) and after my year returning to my own classroom teaching (phase three); yet its unfolding enabled me to make sense of the other layers of my developing understanding about evaluation.

This research project is, then, an attempt to connect my personal and professional understandings of evaluation, to link the subjectivity of evaluation to "objective" evaluation. It is a "project of possibility ... a project that attempts to study reality in order to change it" (Weiler, 1988, p.xi). It is only by understanding the complexity of social forces that we can begin to transform them. I have attempted to understand through this study the forces that shape our evaluative beliefs and practices.

Markers along the Course

This study is written in nine sections that develop multiple facets of evaluation. I provide a context for my research through autobiographical writing in the first two sections (Autobiographical Beginnings and Contextualizing My Questions) which then led me to examine the messiness of the real-life contexts of teachers and students in classrooms in sections three and four (Un(assuming) and Dilemmas: Mixxed (mess)ages). An examination of teachers' realities exposes several issues of broader societal concern which are the central and dominant forces shaping evaluative practices in schools, discussed in sections five, six, and seven (Clarity, Power, and Gaps). The final two sections return to autobiographical writing in a view of my own classroom practices as I attempt to re-identify and re-shape the issues which must concern us as students and teachers and influence our understandings and practices of evaluation (Re-positioning and Autobiographical Continuing). The writing of the final two sections has become possible through the lenses created by the previous sections.

The autobiographical sections of my dissertation have situated it in a particular time and place and have positioned me as a woman, as a researcher and as a teacher. In the world of the classroom teacher where "what one *does* is so close to who one *is*" (Hobson, 1996, p. 2), it is vital that we recognize ourselves as "person" as well as "teacher" or "researcher". Lewin (1948) suggested that the person stands at the centre of his or her own life space and that an understanding of that life can only be accomplished by beginning with the perspective of that individual.

This writing is created of layers of my personal and professional self. The connections between personal and professional pervade all life; it is only through interrogating our personal histories that we are able to determine the beliefs, values, and assumptions that shape our professional lives and influence the expectations that manifest themselves in our evaluative comments to students. Through the writing of my personal/professional space, I have attempted to

establish my author-ity and voice as paradoxically existing both "inside" and "outside" participant observation. My "quest-ioning" (Hart, 1991) began from within my personal space -- I began to consider issues and to develop questions that arose out of genuine concerns, explorations, and questioning of my "self" and my role as evaluator. In my position of "outside" participant observer in school-based research, I have gained a general understanding of some of the issues that influence evaluation through my work with teachers and students. By way of formal interviews, informal conversations, observations, and collection of samples of student work I have been able to more fully understand the issues and contexts that shape their lifeworlds, to hear their voices and to see their contexts. The broader understandings gained as "outsider" enabled me to re-develop my questions as I returned to an "inside" position as a classroom teacher. I continued to question my own practices as evaluator and asked others to also observe and comment on my practices as I focused on the microcosm of my own classroom.

Although this research project follows a pathway through my time and space, there are opportunities for the reader to connect with the pathway at many junctions. An autobiographical positioning will create one reading of the sections that follow, but the reader may choose to select a different order, depending on perspective or interest. A concern for the power relationships developed in classrooms and perpetuated through evaluative practices may be of initial concern to some readers. This section may have an impact on readers concerned with struggles of gender, class, or race. A reader concerned with issues of voice, authority, or language may select the sections entitled "Clarity" or "Gaps" through which to enter this text. A discussion of future classroom possibilities might lead the reader to the final two sections where I reposition my study in the context of a junior high classroom.

The sections re-present multiple voices and perspectives in my attempt to unravel the layers of complexity surrounding aspects of evaluation, to feel and hear and see the influences of this weighty

issue. This introduction is an invitation for the reader to begin in a comfortable space and contine to wend a course from there.

2

Taken (in) by the Mixed (Mess)ages of Evaluation

Autobiographical Beginnings

I took a walk today
raging at the world
brisk, fierce strides
jaw clenched fists tightly balled
harshly judging
life

angry tears blurred
my vision
I cannot clearly think
cannot decide

outlines soften and
I blink
a dandelion in clear focus
brightly yellow
a perfectly sloped toadstool
toasted brown

the wind clutches me
hurrying me on

I catch a glimpse of
ivory wings black-tipped extending
joyfully gliding on
the stiff air
joyfully
gliding

I slow my pace
enjoy the buffeting wind
the golden circles
waving dancing branches
gleaming green

I stop, sit down amidst
the flowers and the grass

I appreciate

The world has become too much with me, I fear. I cannot find joy in life, in my hurry to accomplish, to complete, to finalize. Joy is subsumed in the fear that perfection can never be attained, in the realization that life is harsh.

I seek to find the spirit of life, to appreciate the new breath brought by the wind, the talk, the song, the ideas shared between humans that connect one to another. I am seeking the spirituality that comes with believing in the power and vitality of the self in its many subject positions, the power to go above and beyond what already exists and leave the pettiness behind. To determine and to recognize the truly important aspects of life.

I seek vitality and energy in life through my teaching, through my "becoming" as a teacher. I search for joy in life as I struggle to understand the nature of teaching and the roles I play as "teacher", struggle with institutional constraints that can effortlessly crush the joy that has been painstakingly created in my classroom. In my own search for meaning I seek for ways to best help those who are my students, to support, inspire, and "lead out" my students, to educate. What is the role of the teacher, of the school, of evaluation, if indeed we are looking for ways to unleash our potential, to honour individual strengths, to go beyond what already exists?

Understanding the Subjectivity of Evaluation

Jeff was a small, quiet, mousy-blonde boy who sat in my class for an entire year. He had difficulties in completing work, he did not work well in groups, he tattled on other students, and constantly "hung around" me. Jeff irritated me, and I was often short with him.

At the end of the year I received a farewell card from Jeff, thanking me and telling me that I was his favourite teacher. I felt that I had been struck as I read his words; I was stunned by my mean-spirited treatment of Jeff. I vowed that next year would be different, that I would find ways to offer

more positive experiences to him. However, I left the school that year for a different situation and have never seen Jeff since. But his words and his face will haunt me always and I will always wonder how I could have better helped him. I wonder if his memory will give me the chance to forgive myself.

My "worldliness", my lack of understanding of Jeff's needs stood in the way of my ability to appreciate Jeff for his individuality and uniqueness. In my rush to evaluate Jeff using my own criteria, I forgot to think about the person "Jeff." My search for an understanding of the nature of teaching must include consideration of all the "Jeffs" that I have encountered.

My search for meaning in teaching and evaluation uncovers another memory, a student who "failed" in the system, whom the system failed. Cory was, if we put any stock at all in intelligence tests and personal observation, very intelligent. He wrote poetry and song lyrics that showed depth and maturity. However, he wrote mostly poetry and little else. Work "assigned" was rarely completed, never with thought or commitment. Cory received 45% on his report card, and it didn't seem to bother him much. I didn't really know.

During the same year Cory became interested in bass guitar. He had no knowledge of music or guitar playing, but within four weeks he had learned how to play the bass, how to read chords, and was able to perform with his group in front of the school audience. Why, then, was I unable to interest Cory in the ideas presented in my language arts class? Why was Cory not able to find enjoyment in class work as he was in his musical endeavours? It would be easy to lay the blame on the student, to suggest that he was lazy and unmotivated, interested in only adolescent pastimes. But I know that there is more to Cory's "failure" than that.

Although I cannot recall clearly the activities I was introducing in these students' classes, I can recognize that there was too much of "teacher" and too little of "student" in the work. I was unsuccessful in enabling the students to find their voices, to express their ideas and

intentions. Although I was offering students choice in the literature they chose to read and the stories they chose to write, it was not enough (Britton, 1970). I was encouraging self-selected literature and writing topics, but their choices had to be approved by me, the teacher and their assignments had to be evaluated by me, the teacher. I was expecting the students to value what I valued, select what I would have selected, complete assignments as I would have completed them.

Seeking Understanding through Re-Memory

My memory takes me further back, to a day early in my teaching career that all beginning teachers dread -- my own teaching evaluation. Being watched and judged, being found lacking.

I was teaching music to elementary students. Every student in the school, from grade one to six, would rotate through my music class in half-hour blocks, twice a week. I would proceed to enlighten, entertain, and engage students in the joys of music. There were, needless to say, students who were not convinced that this was a necessary part of their growth and development. One student in particular, Darren, caused me (and most of the teachers) to shudder at the sight of him. It was this class that the assistant superintendent chose to unexpectedly visit. He watched a class where Darren and his friends entertained themselves brilliantly while I made futile attempts to "control" the situation. After the class, I listened to the assistant superintendent analyze the class and my "performance". He suggested ways that I could have dealt with Darren (all having been tried before), and ways that I could improve my teaching. He refused to give me permanent certification, claiming it was "for my own good." I was never asked about my previous attempts with Darren, my possible successes, my beliefs about teaching. I was never asked to speak. Voiceless and devastated, I accepted his decision about my future. He did, after all, have the authority to make this evaluation, and to base it on anything he selected as criteria.

At that time, and for many years after, I attempted to determine what was expected of me, to uncover the skills and abilities required of a "good" teacher. I wanted to please, to be recognized as a "good"

teacher. I was afraid of being told that I did not "measure up" or "meet the requirements" set by the system for effective teaching. My fear caused me to remain silent, seeking the answer to my question, "What do they want?"

The students were asking their own versions of the same question, and as I attended to them, my question began to shift focus. My own beliefs and values became clearer as I sought answers to the question, "What do the students, as individuals, want, and how can I best give it to them?" Despite the difficulty students have in expressing their views in the classroom, they are often able to present their voices in other places. They act out in hallways, behave roughly on the playground, offer passive resistance to teacher direction.

Trent was a student in my class early in my career, a rough boy who was older than the others and less capable in "school work." Trent had been identified as a trouble-maker, and I had been warned. He came from a transient family, and a transient part of town. It was clear that Trent was headed in the wrong direction and there wasn't much that we (teachers, school) could do, or were willing to do, to change it. Early on in the year I found myself having to protect Trent from unnecessary "attention" from teachers. In a dispute, Trent was the only student identified and held accountable. Despite my own fear of "the system" I could not remain quiet.

I began to listen for student voices, to find ways to understand their comments. I recognized that I valued student voices, and determined to find ways to validate their voices, their "real" voices. I have heard many things about myself from students that I did not find pleasant or flattering. I have struggled to ignore my own ego in an attempt to recognize the views of students -- something that has been very often difficult, sometimes impossible. We are fragile, and need protection. I, too, have needed protection from truths that were too unpleasant, too difficult to hear, represented in ways I could not comprehend. I have "heard" mixed messages, partial communications, interpreted stories, and have created mixed messages for others.

Recognizing My "self" as I Articulate Beliefs and Values

My beliefs and values, however, have remained largely unarticulated throughout my teaching. They became evident through my actions and through my words but have remained generally unnamed. As I came to realize through my actions with students like Trent, I value all students and believe that as teachers we must find ways to reach all of our students. I value risk-taking, strong voice, ability to make connections, conviction, and sense of responsibility. These values shape my teaching and articulate the beliefs I hold about education, students, and teachers. They cause me to make assumptions about the nature of my classroom and the activities I introduce. They have caused me discomfort with regard to the nature of evaluative practices that have been accepted as valid in education and have caused me to question those practices. They have caused me to question my role as educator/teacher, to recognize the messy overlap that comes from playing many roles at one time (Greene, 1995).

The two roles assumed by a teacher that seem to clash most severely are the helping, caring role and the judging, correcting role. Students look to their teachers to give them guidance and support, to make suggestions and offer advice. They value the words and ideas of their teachers, they implement them into their writing and their thinking. They complete their assignments under the guidance of their teacher and hand them in to be evaluated by the same person that has just given them help. The teacher must then assume the role of judge, while at the same time not really able to relinquish the role of guide. Not only is there a confusion of roles for the teacher, there is also an emotional investment in both the student and the student's work. The evaluation becomes a tangle of emotions, suggestions, judgments and corrections juxtaposed on the page, left for the student to decipher. As noted by Searle and Dillon (1980), teachers' responses to student work have focused largely on pointing out the errors found; specific reference to content was a rare feature of teachers' responses.

Over the years I have come to value one aspect of teaching more than any other -- the trusting relationship that forms in the words and ideas shared between teacher and student. The relationship connects teacher and student as two human beings seeking meaning and understanding, together and separate. It enables joy to flourish in a classroom, a comfortable space to be created in an institutional setting. However, the relationship, built on trust, is fragile in its tenuousness and brevity. The trust can be lost in the confusion of teacher roles. The guiding, helpful teacher becomes a stranger as she turns to evaluate the student's work, work that is a representation of the student her/himself. How can students distinguish the roles assumed by the teacher? How can teachers maintain their integrity? How can the trusting relationship be maintained despite the confusion created by shifting teacher roles?

Brian was an aspiring musician/lyricist who spent most of his time writing songs and playing his guitar. I spent many hours with Brian and his band, supervising, suggesting, and encouraging. Brian was talented and prolific, but his written work seldom received the attention it required to be considered "complete" -- to my way of thinking anyway. And I was the teacher. Brian would hand in many poems written on scraps of paper, poems he would expect me to accept as finished work. As the teacher, I evaluated the work based on criteria I used for all of the students' writing, and Brian's talents never shone through. We struggled to determine and maintain our relationship as it shifted from one setting to another.

Mapping the Subject

Pile and Thrift (1995) suggest that a relationship is based on connections made between two complex selves or subjects, holding a "mass of different and sometimes conflicting subject positions" (p.1). They suggest a process of "mapping" the subject in order to both describe and enable the subject to journey on. The journey, however, is worked out in joint actions with other subjects, actions bound together by mutual dispositions and shared understandings which they both take from and contribute to (p. 30).

I have often questioned my assumption, my hope, that it is possible to develop a positive trusting relationship between a teacher and a student. In a situation where the teacher is the authority, the holder of power, how is it possible to develop a relationship based on trust and the mutual exchange of ideas? Is it possible for students and teachers to share their ideas and opinions honestly and openly, or will there always be a guardedness, a fear of being "exposed" and vulnerable? As evaluator the teacher has the last word on student performance. Regardless of the negotiation processes that might occur between teacher and student throughout the activities, judgment falls on the shoulders of the teacher. This role gives both the student and the teacher disadvantages in the development of relationship. The teacher as guide and mentor cannot ignore the role that awaits her at the end of the activity -- assigning a "mark" or "grade" to the work. The student as explorer and learner cannot ignore the role that awaits -- that of underling awaiting a judgment of her/his work. The relationship is framed by positions of power/lack of power assigned to the roles of teacher and of student.

We as "subjects" come to place ourselves into "power-ridden, discursively constituted, practically-limited, material-bounded identities. The subject assumes ... an identity on the basis of commonality with others and yet that subject ... assumes that she is an individual, unique, sovereign" (Pile and Thrift, 1995, p. 39). The recognition of commonalities with others also poses difficulties, depending on the discourses we recognize as our own. At one time I speak the language of teacher as guide, but in another moment I speak as learner, and equally as quickly I am reframed as judge. "The subjection of the subject," suggest Pile and Thrift, "is instituted through the inscription of meaning and power through the ... body: mastery, mind, skin, class, sexuality " (p. 44). Issues of clarity and language will be dealt with in a later section of this dissertation.

Assumptions of Classroom Power

Students recognize, either explicitly or implicitly, the power that they lack and the discourses from which they are excluded. They attempt to gain some of the power withheld from them. They may challenge the work assigned to them or they may challenge the evaluations made of their work. Students recognize that their position is "charged with subversion and resistance as well as meaning and authority " (Pile and Thrift, p. 44). Students may attempt to gain power by searching for answers to the question, "What does the teacher want?" Students are drawn to this question, certain that power and success will be theirs once the answers have been found, not realizing that the answers are at best elusive, often nonexistent. Teachers maintain their hold on the power as they ask the question, "Why don't the students listen?", convinced themselves that they hold the answers that the students seek, that their teacher discourse is most enlightening. If students lack the words to listen with, how can they hear? How will the students know they are not hearing, cannot hear?

The power being discussed here refers to "a sense of control or influence exercised over others" (The Chambers Dictionary, 1994, p. 1341). This definition of "power" implies an external force being applied without assent or permission of those being controlled or influenced. This is the sense of power we understand in a hierarchy such as school, where the teacher is placed as the figure of authority. There is, however, another possible understanding of power that suggests potential for interdependence rather than dependence. If the definition of power is viewed as "strength or energy" then it becomes possible for both teacher and student to hold internally-derived power to slip through structurally-determined boundaries. The subordinate subjectivity of the student shifts to that of a collaborative and cooperative role. Foucault (1980) suggests that power is exercised or practiced rather than possessed, and so circulates, passing through every related force. Students, as well as teachers, exercise power. Power does not necessarily need to be repressive since it can serve to incite, induce, seduce, make easier or more difficult, enlarge or limit, or make more or less probable (Gore, 1993). It is this sense of personal

power that I attempt to explore with students in the last two sections of this dissertation.

Traditionally power has referred to what can be seen, shown, and manifested. However, Foucault suggests a notion of power, "disciplinary" power, which is exercised through its invisibility. The disciplined individual (student or teacher) remains continually visible and therefore subjected to the invisible power of unnamed, unseen "they". It is the elusiveness of the nameless that gives "them" power. Once recognized for its lack of name and subjectivity, this disciplinary power can be faced and challenged by teachers and students working together.

Positioning Myself between Authority and (Author)ity: Shifting Power

Continually I feel the need to reconsider my subjective position of authority. The reactions and reflections of my students have compelled me to re-view my evaluative practices and the discourses which have shaped my practices.

Several years ago I assigned a research assignment to my students, one in which they were to connect their learnings from both language arts and social studies classes. I developed a guide sheet for them to follow, requesting that they first brainstorm, then develop a thesis statement, then create an outline, then take notes, then ... Encouraging them to follow this process, I thought, would enable them to do more than copy a passage from an already published source. They would be guided to learn "the process" of researching correctly -- my way. I did not get much negative response from the students, although I was aware that some of them had found ways to subvert my system. However, Kevin decided that this process did not work for him, that he preferred to develop his research paper in other ways, that he preferred to take notes first and not to use a formal outline. I recognized that there were several possible choices for "handling" this situation. One would be to force him to use my process by withholding marks. Another would be to talk to him and pleasantly tell him my reasons for this particular process, strongly encouraging him to do it my way. A third

option was to enable Kevin to explain his approach to me and for me to acknowledge that there was more than one way to complete a task. This third option was by far the most difficult for me to consider. I had to acknowledge that perhaps Kevin did know something about learning, and about his ability to learn. I realized that I would have to reconsider my assignment, acknowledging that there may be more than one valid "process" for completing a task.

If we are able to shift our understanding of the varying discourses of "power," to consider power as the strength and energy we all harbour inside ourselves, we can more easily reconsider the hierarchy that exists in schools today, one in which both teachers and students are caught. We can begin to recognize our power as a source of joy and inspiration for ourselves and those around us rather than as a weapon we must wield in order to maintain control. We can help students to reconsider the question "What does the teacher want?" and instead have them asking, "How can I deal with this assignment in ways that help me to understand and communicate my ideas?" We can reconsider our own mapped positions and the frames within which we are caught. We can begin to see ourselves and our actions as not only being determined by existing structures, but also as determining future structures. We may argue that circumstances determine our choices and our actions; we may also understand our own abilities to *create* history.

My own desires to reconfigure the existing power structure have encouraged me to change my teaching and evaluation practices. My fears of being challenged, of not having the answers for my superordinates, have caused me to change slowly. I have been influenced to reshape my teaching practices by my own intuitive beliefs, by my readings, and by my mentors. I have been compelled to consider my evaluative practices because of multiple collisions between these and the approaches to learning I have implemented in my classrooms.

<u>Wayfinding -- Uncovering the Direction by Re-tracing the Journey</u>

I recognized many years ago that basal readers and workbooks were boring and uninspiring for my students and for me. I attempted to introduce a variety of literature by reading aloud to my students, by scrounging copies of novels and giving students reading choices. I began to ask them to write the questions rather than to answer them, to share their ideas with me in journals, and to present their ideas in a variety of formats. I began to read adolescent fiction myself, acquainting myself with titles I could recommend to the students. I was introduced to Nancie Atwell's In the Middle (1987), a text that caused me to consider workshop approaches to learning about reading and writing. I continued to experiment with journal writing, both for myself and for my students, and attempted to implement student/teacher conferences into my programs. In my struggle to find assessment consistent with these approaches, I explored ways to use portfolios with my students, seeking alternatives to understanding what I wanted as I sought to uncover what the students wanted.

Voices Blending

Throughout my many experiments in assignments and classroom activities, I came to recognize that I valued class participation and enjoyment. I looked for the students' expression of voice and for their willingness to take risks. I attempted to structure assignments that would enable these qualities to develop. I encouraged students to write personal opinions and insights, to question and critique. I asked them to explore autobiographical writing and make connections to their lives. However, the more personal the students' writing became and the more of themselves they invested into their work, the more difficulty I had in evaluating it. The more vulnerable the students became as they exposed themselves, the more vulnerable I became to their desires and fears. We found objectivity to become impossible as we became closer to each other and to our work. We needed to find ways to create a distance from ourselves and from the other people sharing our work.

All of the students were requested to develop a project that they could present as part of their reading workshop activities. Cheryl chose to select and read a variety of poems, both her own and those written by others. She chose one poem to begin, a poem she had written about her relationship with her father and his struggle with alcoholism. Early on in the poem she began to cry and although she had every opportunity to stop, she insisted on reading the poem to its end. The class was stunned. Initially they did not know how to respond (as I did not) but they applauded and proceeded to offer comments of support and admiration, to show the value they saw in her "self" and in her work. I had great difficulty in giving a "grade" to Cheryl's assignment.

I spent several years as the sole language arts teacher in small schools, and was able to develop my own program. Although there was no opposition to the programs and the ideas I implemented in my classes, there was also no one with whom I could share ideas. I became used to doing whatever I chose to do, not collaborating or sharing with anyone else. It came as a shock, then, when I found myself teaching at a large junior high school with several other language arts teachers. I was told that there were "common" final exams, "common" units, and "common" resources. It did not take me long to find a voice, which I used to express my opposition to the commonness of the program. I wanted the freedom to be able to make decisions that would benefit my unique classes of students, the opportunity to listen to my students before I selected materials. I was to remember this desire when I became "head" of the department in the following year. I believed that the best way to do my job as head of the department was to try to support the rest of the teachers, to offer suggestions and to provide opportunities for conversation and discussion. I did not feel that it was my role to tell other professionals what to do, or how to do it. I attempted to develop a community of teachers and learners who found enjoyment in what they were doing.

I did not then have the words or the concepts to articulate my beliefs, but can now better understand my desire to explore and enjoy the complexities of the culture. Rather than accepting social

structures, we need to question identities, to construct them reflexively rather than simply to recognize them. The univocal becomes polyvocal. We come to understand identity as dynamic, "building on a theory of qualitative multiplicity which can never be reduced to one principle ... The self and identity are seen as an affirmative, active flux, an image set in direct opposition to a monolithic and sedentary image of self and identity which is seen as clearly deriving from a phallologocentric system" (Pile and Thrift, 1995, p. 10).

Un-labelling the role of "student"

I learned a great deal from my experience as department head, learnings that I have been able to transfer to my work with students as well. If it is not effective or appropriate to tell colleagues how to work, I thought, perhaps it is not effective or appropriate to tell students how to work either. Perhaps there are other ways of relating to students that will prove to be more stimulating and educational. I have carried this thought with me through several years of teaching. I have found myself giving considerable thought to the concept of "student". What is expected of a person in the position of student? What is the role of a student?

The concept of "student" is an institutional one and although the student is, first and foremost, a person, the institution has created the objectified concept of "student" (Pile and Thrift, 1995, p. 4). Even though a student comes to an educational experience with the intent of learning, that does not eradicate the lifetime that is the student. A student also has a set of beliefs and values that must be acknowledged in order for meaningful communication to take place between a teacher and the student. A challenge to teachers is how we can acknowledge and value the student's background while at the same time not ignoring the prescribed curriculum, the teacher's own experiences and values, and the other students who comprise the class. Approaches offered by many educators over the last two decades have given direction to classroom teachers. Peter Elbow, (1973), Donald Graves (1984), Donald Murray (1985), Nancie Atwell (1987), Tom Romano

(1987), and Lucy Calkins (1991), to name a few, have informed my understanding of ways in which I can work with students to provide them with choices, flexibility, and confidence. These authors have also been able to suggest ways in which I can view myself as teacher and learner in the classroom. As we as educators come to acknowledge the student as a subject, as a person, we must come to view our role as "teacher" in a different light, one that provides spaces for the student's voice and desires as well as for a relationship that enables the teacher to support and guide without continually judging the merit of the student's work.

I became involved in a collaborative research project during the time that I was struggling to understand my role as teacher and my students' role as learners. A university colleague and I worked together to understand the nature of evaluation in a classroom setting, evaluation of students and evaluation of teachers. Through our past experiences with teacher and student evaluation, we determined that evaluation should be viewed as a process, contributing to ongoing learning, rather than a product. We attempted to strive for collaborative negotiation, conferences, and celebration of our work and our students' work (Hart, 1989). In an attempt to "fathom the mysteries of one's own being in relation to one's responsibilities for others", (Hart, p. 140) we suggested that evaluation should be an educative quest toward "authentic dialogue where personality is developed" (Gusdorf (1965) in Hart, p. 140) rather than a monologue of authoritative ideas and events. As I relive my research experience I realize that I have been mapping my understandings of student-teacher relationships and subject positions, attempting to understand that which has elusive boundaries and multiple (often conflicting) voices for many years.

As I have attempted to incorporate the ideas of leading theorists and practitioners, seeking ways to encourage, enable, applaud the efforts and abilities of my students, I have continually run into the high wall of evaluation built with an enlightenment logic that insists on surveying and pinning down everything. I incorporated student journals into my classes in order for students to explore voice; I had to

evaluate them. I developed portfolios in order for students to have choice; I had to evaluate those. I included conferences in order for students to take responsibility for their learning, and still I was ultimately responsible for the evaluation.

My discomfort with my role as evaluator and my frustration with the walls blocking the development of real teaching/learning relationships have led me to listen for and acknowledge multiple voices and to ask the questions I attempt to explore in this research project. I continue to seek answers to the questions, "What is the true nature of teaching?" and "How can I best help those who are my students?" I am attempting to understand how to evaluate students' work, based upon their own subjectivity, in ways that help me to understand these questions, to understand the influences on our practices and the ways in which we can recognize these influences. Through my research project I seek to understand the discourse of evaluation as it is imposed on the work of students and teacher, to listen to multiple voices that speak their concerns and their intentions. I am attempting to seek new directions for using evaluation as learning situations, as beginnings rather than as endings and to understand the complexities that construct evaluative practices.

3

Listening to the Mixed (Mess)ages of Evaluation

Contextualizing my questions

my ideas float free
like soap bubbles on a
windy day

I try to capture them
ground them with my life

transform these shimmering
elusive
colours and
shapes

into words
give them texture beyond
my memory

weave their irridescence
through life's surrounding fabric

Identifying Autobiographical Threads

The experiences and values that are my life become threads that weave in and out, voices that appear and dissolve. Through identifying autobiographical events I come to be aware of these threads. These threads become my questions, my quest for meaning and sense of "self" and of place. I can situate myself in the present through identifying the threads of the past and recognizing their potential for the future. I give myself context amidst a world of words and ideas.

The threads I identify have woven themselves through the events of my life, for most of the story elusive and hidden. As I give memory to these events they begin to intertwine, gaining strength through their connecting. These threads give spirit to my chronological life and give play to the eventlessness of daily life that does not recognize or value the criticalness of events that change our lives. The threads weave in joyful and unexpected ways, appearing and disappearing, making connections in unpredictable and exciting ways.

The connections made by threads winding around and back create the possibility of relationships, relationships which form the essence of our spiritual selves. Through teaching we realize relationships that were previously only possibilities. Teaching is a spiritual act, intensely personal and passionate, and through teaching we can connect individual concerns with societal concerns, giving meaning to both. We enable students to create parts of a meaningful whole that is greater than our individual selves. The threads are the voices of my "self" which are created from the experiences and values of my life. They have come together in the form of questions that relate to teaching and to the evaluation of those students who have been "taught."

Objectifying Subjects -- Subjectifying Objects

When students are required to find a "right answer" to a question or problem, teachers can be "objective" about evaluating their responses. There is nothing "personal" in the evaluation. However,

when students are required to develop their ideas and answers into a longer written form, their responses become "subjects" rather than an "objects." The "subject" encompasses the student's self as well as the student's ideas. The evaluation becomes personal and messy. The answers are not clear and the teachers' responses to the students' answers become open to interpretation. There exists an ambiguity that is inherent in language itself; once we begin to use language to convey evaluative comments we imply meaning that may not have been intended. Although we may assume that our words hold our exact meaning, and that exact meaning can be gleaned by the reader, our assumption may be false. We may be leaving gaps that swallow up our intent and interrupt our communication. "It is in language that differences acquire meaning for the individual" suggests Weedon (1987, p. 76), and Benveniste (1973) observes that language is deeply marked by the expression of subjectivity. It is only within discourse that an individual finds cultural identity. Discourse provokes the emergence of subjectivity because it consists of discrete instances ... language puts forth "empty" forms which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriates to himself (sic) and which he relates to his "person" (p. 220). Rosenblatt (1938) describes the process of reading as an event between the text and the reader -- meaning is negotiated and created *between* the two. This suggests that the teacher as evaluator has the power to create the student's text in a manner acceptable to the teacher.

Central Research Focus

As teachers we put a great deal of store in "marking" our students' work in order to give them feedback and to help them improve their skills and their thinking. We spend numerous hours evaluating, marking, grading. However, how are our marks upon the students' papers read and interpreted by the students? How do students interpret the comments written by their teachers and how do the comments shape students' further responses? How can the voices of teachers and students help to expand my understanding of the issues of evaluation?

Initiating A Research Context

In an attempt to explore evaluation more broadly than my own experience, I adopted a researcher perspective and developed a plan to work with a group of five teachers working in a local high school over the course of a semester. These were teachers who regularly asked their students to complete written assignments and continually contended with issues of evaluation. The group was comprised of three English teachers, one biology teacher, and one social studies teacher. Each of the teachers had considerable experience at their subject area and at the high school level. The years of teaching experience ranged from twelve to twenty-seven years. All of the teachers had questions about the nature of evaluation and their role in evaluative processes used in their school.

In all high schools in Alberta, students write a "diploma" exam administered by the provincial Department of Education at the end of their grade twelve courses. Their final mark is comprised of a mark averaged from the course work and the exam mark. Teachers, then, are conscious of preparing their students for this final assessment and also of maintaining a "standard" level of achievement and grading in their own classes. Deviation between the teacher's assigned grade and the exam grade are noted by school and system administrators in an end of the year review of examination results. Teachers are held "accountable" for the grade they have assigned. These exams are not given in the other grade levels, but teachers feel a sense of responsibility to prepare the students for the "upcoming" exam.

Each school setting is unique, individual, and rich in information. A school has its own unique culture, has a life of its own, so even though schools have commonalities they are all individuals. Even to the point of being life forms unto themselves. This school has a life and a culture that I gradually became part of in a small way. As an outsider I did not feel privy to the culture -- I had to earn my right to be in the school, to gain the trust of the teachers and students who

made up the culture, to prove that I am who I say I am, and to deserve the privilege of being part of the school. That in itself was a slow process which began months before my actual research.

I entered the staffroom and felt very uncomfortable and uneasy. I was out of place, did not belong in this staffroom where everyone else had a vested interest in being there. They all belonged, knew each other, had coffee mugs and favourite seats. This staffroom has three entrances, a common door, a men's door, and a women's door, suggesting the age of the building. There are large windows overlooking the front lawn and parking lot of the school. (Journal entry, October 25, 1995).

Each classroom that I visited had a spirit of its own, created by the teacher and developed by the participants in the class. The arrangement of the classroom, the activities introduced, the texts chosen, the relationships developed, all blended to create an atmosphere of learning. The usual seating arrangement in the five classrooms was single desks placed in rows; however, these desks were often rearranged in the class, into circles, small groups, large groups. In one class two sets of rows faced each other and the teacher sometimes took a position in between the rows:

The teacher's desk is placed at the side of the room; the desk and the screen for overhead projections suggest a "front" to the room, but the teacher is not prominent there.

In another class the desks are clustered in various arrangements which enable the students to work in groups.

The teacher has selected a variety of posters to display in the room, and the expanse of windows surveying the playing field to the east let in lots of natural light. The teacher's desk is in the opposite corner to the door but it would be difficult to find a "front" of the class. I suppose it is facing the blackboard, which would put the teacher's desk at the back of the class. But it does not feel like the back, just aside. The front and the focus changes regularly.

In yet another classroom the desks remained in one position throughout the term.

The class is like a library in its silence. The teacher has a desk at the front of the room, but usually positions herself at the back at another desk.

In a fourth classroom the teacher's desk is at the front of the room opposite the door.

The teacher has a stool positioned by the roll-overhead where she sometimes gives notes. Students' desk arrangements vary between semi-circles, group arrangements, and rows. The windows are not a big feature in this classroom and they overlook a parking lot.

The final classroom is a

bright, naturally-lit room with a view to the front entrance of the school. There are regular student desks at the front half of the room and a lab station at the back. The teacher's desk is at the front of the room, but the teacher often positions himself at the high counter at the front of the room.

All of the furniture, like the school itself, is well-worn. The school is a 60s style structure, serving a working-class population of various cultural backgrounds. It is surrounded by the bustling city, small shopping malls, restaurants, and other signs of urban life. The hallways are wide but dark, lighted artificially, from which classrooms may be entered through sturdy wooden doors. The classrooms themselves have access to natural light that streams in through windows along one wall.

The students themselves are generally polite and friendly. It is not uncommon for a student to hold the door open for me to enter, to smile and say hello. As I noted in an early journal entry, "*Many cultures are represented, I can tell by the appearance of the students. They are Oriental, black, Lebanese, Caucasian.... When I enter the school, there is always a student to hold the door for me. Sometimes the student has to go out of his/her way to hold the*

door. Always respect and politeness. Not once have I encountered disrespect or rudeness in students at this school. They are pleasant, and once I have been in their classes, they smile at me in the hallway, make comments, ask questions ... they appear to be interested in why I am in the class, what I am trying to find out, and to answer questions I ask of them." (February 6)

Throughout my work in the school the students were willing to talk with me, to share their ideas and their work. This generosity was also present with the staff members, who would willingly give their time to talk with me or participate in a group conversation, although it was often difficult to schedule group meetings. My journal entry reflects this, *"...I cannot count on the teachers to give a great deal of their free time to meet with me. It's a funny thing, because they are quite relunctant to commit their time to more meetings (and quite frankly, I can see their point -- they are innundated with meetings as it is.) However, they will quite willingly stand talking for fifteen or twenty minutes, between classes, at lunch, whenever we meet, to discuss what is going on in their classrooms. They willingly give up prep time -- I talk to all of them during prep time and there is never a mention that they have other things to do." (February 10)*

Finding a Position

Before my actual research project began, I spent four months becoming known in the school as a "sympathetic colleague", a fellow teacher who had experienced similar concerns and conditions. During that time I visited classes, the staffroom, and had regular informal conversations with the teachers and students. Although I was an "outsider", I attempted to understand the school culture and get to know the teachers in a personal way, through conversation as well as observation. The teachers were all very supportive of my interests and, as the actual project began, were accommodating of my requests to visit their classes and spend time talking with them. Initially, I planned to work with the teachers as a collaborative group (Haug, 1987). I hoped to implement a methodology named by Haug as "memory work." They were, however, reluctant initially to work in a group

situation and preferred to work individually with me. As my research proceeded I realized the value of working independently with the teachers. I had opportunities to develop a rapport with each one of them, to understand their perspectives, and to learn from them. I was able to hear what had influenced and constructed their teacher selves. Although five very different teaching styles emerged, there were commonalities in the teachers' philosophies and in their teaching. They all struggled with the same external pressures, they all had the interests of the students foremost in their planning, they all had strong philosophies that framed their teaching.

There were benefits to being an "outside" researcher, but also disadvantages. On the positive side, I had the time to work with several teachers, have conversations with them, share their ideas with their colleagues, gain ideas from a wide variety of perspectives. As Jay (1993) suggests, perhaps only an outsider can bring an event or idea more fully to the surface. I maintained a distance from each situation and was able to glean themes that were common to more than one teaching situation. I was able to observe several students interacting with different teachers as they appeared in different classes I was observing. I was not constrained by the school policies and was able to view with more distanced eyes.

However, being an outsider was also constraining in some ways. I was not emotionally tied to the situation and therefore did not have the "feeling" of the school that I would have being a teacher in the situation. Although I had been a teacher myself for fifteen years and had been involved in research and study for several years, I did not have the credibility of one who had struggled alongside the teachers in this specific situation, facing frustrations and unreasonable expectations. Working with five different teachers, I did not have the continuity of someone working on a daily basis with the same students. There were gaps in my observations, gaps of time and of experiences. My position as an outsider afforded me a different and more distanced perspective from the teachers within the school situation. However, I was always the outsider.

Therefore, although my observations and discussions were situated in a context, one that I had attempted and continue to attempt to understand, they were also out of context. I was able to describe the associated surroundings and setting of my observations, but did not have all of the parts of the "text" in which to fix the meaning of my observations. In my weaving of a meaning, I had left gaps and broken threads. I was often unable to decipher or translate the many discourses I had heard.

Gaps and discontinuous themes, however, are a part of any story, any research. By listening and observing carefully, I have presented perspectives of the various teachers. I have intertwined the words and ideas of the teachers in order to present themes that create relationships and understandings between us, to continue the inquiry from multiple perspectives and to interpret the various discourses shaping the teachers' experiences and their "selves".

Contextualizing

The perspectives on evaluation and teaching that have influenced me have been presented by these five teachers, five people who have spent many years developing their teaching practices. I have listened and observed on many occasions, visiting the classrooms weekly for four months, attempting to glean some semblance of their beliefs and understandings. I have recorded their words on audiotape, transcribed them, written them as notes, and stored them in my memory. I have sorted through those words, sifting them through my own understanding, re-presenting them in conversation and on paper. Each conversation influenced my understanding of the last, and the direction of the next. Each conversation has existed within a context I constructed, written so that I might construct a meaning within a different context at a different time. The interpretation that follows shaped my understandings of future conversations and classroom practices I observed.

The members of this educational community seemed genuinely interested in pursuing ideas and learning from each other. Growth has been a consistent metaphor appearing in the conversations, growth as a result of planting, nurturing, and providing natural light. The teachers' focus was on the development of their students above all else. They attempted to provide conditions conducive to the well-being of their students, both intellectually and emotionally.

All of the teachers working with me on this research project talk about their desire to help students succeed. Underlying all of their actions and words is a genuine concern for the development of the students, a desire for them to experience successes that will follow them through life. These teachers have devoted their lives to perpetuating knowledge and opportunity for each individual student and have structured their professional experiences to support these desires.

The activities and materials that teachers introduce in their classrooms also structure the learning atmosphere and attempt to provide opportunities for success for all students. I visited each of the five classrooms on a minimum of six different occasions (some classes many more times than six), often staying for the entire morning. In the different classrooms I visited, I noted many strategies, materials, and approaches to using the materials. The strategies and materials often changed because of the content or theme being presented. In some situations the teacher presented thought-provoking and entertaining lectures, followed by student questions and written exercises. In one instance the teacher "dressed in role" as famous geneticist to deliver a lecture. In other situations the teacher posed a focusing question that encouraged the students to delve into the text, or had the students read and respond individually to questions about the reading. At different times the students had opportunities to make presentations, view films, listen to song lyrics, complete experiments, role-play situations. On the walls there were displays of posters and presentations created by the students.

Opportunities for talk existed in each of the classrooms in different forms. In some classrooms informal talk dominated the class -- students talked to the teacher and to each other, allowing gaps, alternate discourses and voices. They compared responses, developed projects, checked for understanding of directions, shared personal anecdotes. Even when students were assigned individual tasks the talk continued. Students needed verification of facts, elaboration, encouragement and guidance. In other classrooms, formal talk dominated. The teacher directed and controlled the talk, using it to give information or instructions. Student talk was directed to the teacher in formal ways, through comments or questions. In yet other classrooms, talk was kept to a minimum as a written text was used as the main source of information. Students conversed to the teacher through their writing.

Texts and other materials were used in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. In some instances the students all used the same text and were given the same assignments to complete. In other cases there was a main text with other materials used to support and expand the main source. Sometimes teachers gave students a choice from a selection of "suitable" texts, and sometimes the students had free choice of all existing materials. Texts could be used to locate factual information, to support or refute existing notions and beliefs, for pleasure, or a combination of all of these.

The manner in which the classrooms were arranged, the materials selected and developed and the activities assigned all influenced the types of relationships that developed and were evident in the classes, both between teachers and students as well as among themselves. Some teachers and students felt most comfortable with formal relationships in which personal lives were kept separate -- there was little reference made in class to situations involving the teacher outside the classroom. In other cases the relationships were more personal and informal, and more individual comments and humorous asides were made. The types of relationships and the levels of conversation that developed seemed to be dependent upon the nature

of the teacher and his/her expectations rather than upon the subject matter being studied. Regardless of the curricular focus, each teacher expressed to me in conversation his or her concern with the exchange of ideas and the development of thoughtful learners in their classes.

Each of the teachers attempted to balance the types of activities expected of the students in the class in order to give variety and to accommodate all of the students. The range and style, however, depended largely on the values and beliefs held by the teachers, how they understood teaching and learning and the level of comfort afforded them through each activity. While some teachers rarely alluded to their personal lives, others used it as a basis for their lessons. Some teachers "improvised" a great deal while others followed a more structured "script." Some teachers used humour, silly jokes, puns, off-hand comments, while other teachers were more serious.

Finding our Teacher Contexts

Those values which are central to our understanding of life and of ourselves, I believe, are evident in the way we structure our classrooms. The classroom arrangement, the materials, the activities, and the strategies all support our personal and professional values, values often unarticulated. Whether we value the knowledge of a set body of literature, strong writing skills, the ability to work independently, or risk-taking, these will come to bear on the structure and atmosphere of our classrooms. These beliefs and values form a set of assumptions that direct our teaching practices and can help or hinder with our growth processes and development as teachers and as learners.

One of the teachers was self-described as a "traditional" teacher. The students were given their assignments and directions at the beginning of the class, and then set to work individually. Although their work was generally individual, there was considerable choice and personal interpretation built into the activities set for them. "If the students know what they're doing, then they can do what they want,"

commented a teacher. The students were welcome to go to the back of the class to talk to the teacher at any time, but they were not allowed to disrupt the rest of the class working. The reason this teacher positioned herself at the back was so that she could survey the class and so that she could talk to the students in relative privacy at the back rather than being observed by all the students in the class if they were at the front. "Why is your class always quiet?" was a question I posed of the teacher. She told me that she wanted the students to think for themselves, to really struggle with their own ideas and the ideas presented in literature they were reading. She did not want them merely regurgitating the ideas of the other students but to come up with ideas all on their own. She wanted to provide an environment in which all students could work and concentrate, and not be disrupted by chatty students.

In a second classroom, the teacher often chose to give the students information through lectures, supplemented with computer simulations, videos, role-playing, demonstrations, and labs. His lectures clearly showed his breadth of knowledge of the discipline and his answers to students' questions showed a depth. He provided his grade twelve students with essay type assignments in order to prepare them for the final exam, to give them an opportunity to think beyond the textbook questions. The teacher sensitively integrated current societal issues with the material of the curriculum. He presented most of the information to the students and posed thought-provoking questions to them, often ones for which he did not have an answer himself. The students were expected to work quietly and listen attentively. Towards the end of the class, as students were working on questions, they often chatted with the teacher about issues relating to the lesson. He responded in a very frank and sincere way, his responses to the students suggesting that he valued each question that was asked of him.

Knowledge and enthusiasm were also presented in a third classroom. The teacher showed his interest in the subject area and his concern for his students' success. He gave many extra hours of his

time to talk to his students individually and encouraged them all to come and see him. His most frequent comment on assignments was "Please see me." Many students took him up on his request and booked appointments to talk to him about their assignments and other issues. The students were involved in a variety of assignments during the class time, including group activities, films, individual assignments, and listening to lecture-type lessons. The students did quite a bit of talking among themselves, and to the teacher, considering various questions as they arose from the lesson topics. The teacher spent most of his "prep" periods in his classroom, preparing materials, marking, developing test banks and exam questions.

A fourth teacher was outgoing and confident, willing to try a variety of strategies and approaches with her students. She had a clear voice and a quick wit which she used to play with her students. She was very knowledgeable about recent developments in her subject area and had a rich literary background which she shared with her students. She sometimes recited passages of works to her students. There were a variety of activities occurring in this classroom in which the teacher encouraged students to probe and to question. The students were expected to be continually developing their vocabulary, their ability to understand and use subject-area terminology, and to connect their understanding of one work to that of another. The teacher wanted the students to become self-directed learners, able to analyze and think about ideas for themselves. The students worked independently and in groups in order to struggle with the issues and concepts presented in class.

The fifth teacher provided yet another view of teaching and learning. She, too, was dynamic, and her teaching had a very personal flavour. She put herself into her lessons and gave her students many opportunities to get to know her as a person as well as a teacher. Her lessons were filled with personal stories and anecdotes and she regularly tried to connect the literature being studied with the students' own personal experiences. She also discussed gender and

cultural issues frequently, attempting to create an awareness in her students of the societal issues that especially concerned her. The students had choice and opportunity to express themselves creatively. There were not many restrictions put on their efforts, but expectations that they would produce their best efforts. Students selected their own working groups. If there were difficulties in the group, the teacher mediated, but expected the students to come up with their own solutions to solve the problems.

Each teacher brought a set of assumptions about teaching and learning, assumptions that mapped the teacher's course and provided a "wayfinding" through the curriculum. We all have assumptions about how the classroom should look, about how students should behave, about the roles we should be playing as teachers in the classroom. The assumptions brought into the classroom can offer a single or multiple entryways into the conversation of the classroom. The assumptions brought by the teacher are suggested through the interactions in the classrooms, the organization and structure of the lessons. Throughout my research with these five teachers I have attempted to examine these assumptions that shape our teaching practices, in particular assumptions that structure our evaluation practices. How do we come to make decisions about types of evaluation, criteria for evaluation, frequency of evaluation? How do our particular beliefs and values influence our decisions, in ways we may recognize and ways we may not recognize? How do our "selves" shape our learning environments, and how do our environments in turn shape our "selves"? The following section considers some of the assumptions that shape teachers' evaluative practices.

4

Surprised by the Mixed (Mess)ages of Evaluation

un(assuming)

Supposing Assumptions

A cursory glance at a gathering of teachers at a conference or convention will exemplify what we already know: teachers are unique and individual. There is no "teacher type", no look that distinguishes teachers from other individuals in society, no uniform or distinguishing marks. The stereotyped old maid teacher with spectacles, high-buttoning blouse, long respectable skirt, disapproving look on her face and a bun in her hair does not exist any more than the high school coach with a whistle around his neck or the kindly and caring grandmotherly kindergarten teacher. As different as teachers are in appearance, we are different as human beings.

In my experiences and knowledge, I have come to believe that teachers are connected to each other by their desire to improve the human condition, to influence the lives of their students, their intent to change the face of the classroom. They are connected by the fears that often face them collectively -- being unappreciated, not knowing the answers, feeling disorganized and overworked. However, they are disconnected in as many ways. The commonalities that teachers share are expressed in diverse ways, as many ways as there are teachers. What makes them unique as teachers, as human beings? How does their uniqueness shape their teacher "selves"? In what ways do their past experiences, their beliefs and values, direct them as teachers? How do they acknowledge these driving forces, so that they consciously control their actions and directions rather than having their unconscious selves continually making their decisions and dictating their feelings?

Teachers often fear exposure. Their work and their students are too important to risk attack from outside scrutiny. As teachers, we

are not afforded many opportunities to reflect upon and articulate our beliefs and often rely on intuitive senses to guide us. We choose to stay bracketed in our classrooms, as un(assuming) teachers, attempting to avoid the "un" that will expose us.

I have exposed several of my own assumptions in the previous paragraph, assumptions that shape my understandings of teaching and teachers. I continually search for my own voice, a voice that speaks from experiences and reflexive practices. My voice has become stronger as I have gained experiences as a teacher and as a tesearcher, as I have become able to speak of my experiences in ways that acknowledge the validity of these experiences in articulate ways. There is no "teacher type" -- is there a teacher voice that can be recognized as speaking for and with teachers collectively? I present myself as a teacher of nearly twenty years teaching experience. How might I (re)present myself as "teacher" without presuming on the uniqueness of each individual teacher? I have exposed assumptions, and through the telling of my own struggles to uncover these assumptions, I represent myself as belonging to the collection of individuals known as teachers. This imaginary has been created through a lifetime of collected images and feelings about teachers that have resonated with my other life experiences. My individual voice weaves in and throughout the cacophonous chaos of voices that have already spoken and have yet to speak. I have attempted to create an understanding of the context in which several teachers work, in order to help readers assume a view of the teachers' motivations and constraints.

Our "selves" begin to become mapped out at a very young age, as relationships form, events occur, memories embed themselves within us. We grow, we add to our "selves", we reshape our "selves". This wayfinding takes us to many different positions and constructs our unconscious as it travels (Pile and Thrift, 1995). We continue to add, but we never lose, any of our experiences or memories. They become repressed, reshaped, traumatized, changed, but all still exist within us, often unacknowledged. We make decisions that enable us to become teachers, we follow a "program of study" that prepares us for

this role, and then we are faced with the reality of a teaching situation. A situation that we are not fully prepared for, a situation that takes us by surprise, one that has not been explicitly addressed in teacher preparation courses. We seek a structure that dictates our way while at the same time we want agency to create our own histories. We rely on our inner "selves" to see us through situations, to provide us with the answers we are seeking. Our individual experiences of body, self, person, identity, and subjectivity are central to the meaning of our experiences. "Human agency is a continuous flow of conduct through time and space, constantly interpellating the social structures" (Pile and Thrift, 1995, p. 2) in which we locate ourselves.

I began my junior high career after several years of teaching elementary school. 1986. I received a draft document of a "new" curriculum, offering new direction and focus. Long pink papers -- a draft of a new curriculum -- telling me what and how to teach. I was pleased with what these pages revealed to me because it gave alternatives to questions at the end of the basal-reader story -- those weren't really my style anyway. I will forever recall an instance when I was a student in elementary school, my frustrated response to long pages of questions to be answered "in complete sentences" --my response was scribbling jagged pencil lines all over the page. But, as a teacher, what to do instead? I knew creative writing, I knew about reading stories to the students, but when it came time to discussing what it was I was or was not doing in my teaching, I was at a loss for words.

Our actions then continue to shape our "selves" and offer further directions. Thus we form/find a path for ourselves through our teaching careers. We are often not consciously aware that a particular elementary teacher in our past has had enormous impact on how we understand teaching, or that an incident in kindergarten has made us fearful, or that a personal belief has structured our teaching practices.

Anna Freud (1979) has developed the idea of transference and has suggested that the idea of one's past unresolved conflicts with others and with self are unconsciously projected onto the meanings of new interactions. It is these past unresolved conflicts that replay

themselves over and over and with new experiences we create new versions of old conflicts. The classroom invites transferential relations because for teachers the classroom re-enacts childhood memories.

I remember back, no, not even remember. There is nothing specific enough to be called a memory. Only a feeling, ongoing and weighty, of failure, of never measuring up to much. But what was worse was the knowledge that I wasn't expected to measure up to much. I had been weighed, measured, and judged by my parents, and found to fit into the "mediocre, never-amount-to-much" category. As a child I knew that although I was organized, efficient, and capable, my siblings had the mark of brilliant possibility upon them. I took piano lessons and practiced hard, never missed a lesson, passed all my exams -- but I wasn't creative or spontaneous (like my brother). I wrote poems and stories (in fact, my school writing experiences led me to becoming an English teacher), but no one read them -- I wasn't eccentric or creative (like my sister). I had thoughts, ideas, and dreams, but wasn't social enough to share them (like my other sister) -- no one knew.

My life has been shaped into a continual battle between my "self" and my perceived mediocrity -- the judgment that had been settled on me so early in my life. It is in reaction to these judgments, I feel, that I seek to reconsider the nature of evaluation, to understand evaluation as an aspect of learning rather than judging. I am attempting to find an understanding that will enable evaluation to expose possibilities rather than to impose limitations.

Transference of experience shapes how teachers respond and listen to students, and shapes how students respond and listen to teachers. For me, this sense of transference has come from childhood experiences and feelings that my life's possibilities were predetermined through continuous and subtle evaluations. "Teaching is learning twice: first, one learns as one prepares for one's students and then one learns from them as one works with them" (Coles, 1992, p. 53). As we teach we need to become aware of the possibility of transferential dynamics shaping our teaching practices, in order to

attempt to understand how we relate to students through our own subjective conflicts. It is only in the pedagogical relation that we begin to encounter our "selves" as teachers.

We are the beliefs and values we hold close to our hearts, both acknowledge and repressed, that shape us and dictate our actions and directions. We are the past that we have experienced, along with the futures we hope to experience. The past does not always hold fond memories; we shy away from it, keep it hidden and disguised. Yet no matter how we try to move beyond, it is to some extent our past experiences, those we do not acknowledge, that shape our teacher selves, that dictate our actions. Without consciously realizing it we are often controlled by a past that looms larger and more imposing as it grows. Our past grows daily, reaching out to connect with the future. We need to find ways to make more explicit the beliefs and values of our past that shape our understandings and ways of living and teaching. We need to find ways to understand our unexamined assumptions that grow out of our beliefs and values. It is through understanding these driving forces that we can more consciously take control of our future directions and decisions, more articulately speak of our teaching.

Teaching exists far beyond the classroom walls, powerful and positive teaching. My father was a teacher, and I recall many students dropping over to the house to share their stories and their lives. They belonged to a mountaineering club my father organized and they shared many exciting adventures, many life-shaping experiences. I spent many weekends myself with my father and his students, skiing and climbing, seeing real interactions between teacher and students teaching each other. I also recall a very different setting, the basement of Duthie's bookstore, where my father would spend many hours selecting books for his students, attempting to share with them his love of literature. I always went along, helping (I thought) in the selection. Teaching was, for me, a way of thinking and living.

Assumptions about evaluation that teachers bring to their classrooms have been shaped by memories and experiences. I continue

to un-cover my personal and professional assumptions through conversations and observations in classrooms.

Re-membering -- (Re-memorying)

Our lives are made up of millions of unarticulated assumptions, and we cannot possibly examine them all. But in order to assume some personal control over our own (and ultimately, our students') educational experiences, it is important to consider, and possibly challenge, the fundamental understandings we hold so closely and tightly locked up. Teachers are encouraged to reflectively consider their practice. What does this mean? How do we engage in reflection? How do we begin to consider thoughts and pre-thoughts that cause us pain and fear, in order to acknowledge their power over us? How do we protect ourselves from memories and thoughts that can be destructive to our selves?

Frigga Haug (1987) has suggested an approach to reawakening these important and often painful memories that offers a degree of safety and comfort. In her writing about "memory work" she suggests that memories can be viewed as objects as well as instruments of our research. By considering the stories in our memories we can find insights into the ways in which we construct ourselves into existing situations. The writing and analyzing of our own sketchy stories is a way of gaining self-confidence, of seeking out the un-named, the silent, and the absent. We need to seek out, through remembering, that which is not said as well as that which is said, to re-evaluate and question what we have always taken for granted.

When asked, we can all recall teachers who have influenced us, encouraged our decision to enter the teaching profession, caused us to love poetry and to hate mathematics. We describe those teachers lovingly or with trepidation. Yes, they have influenced us, but how? We often do not articulate our thoughts or memories until we are asked. Miller (1983) suggests that children's memories, for reasons of self-protection, are selective. They often only remember the adult's friendly

manner and repress the other more negative manners. One teacher from the high school recalled a former high school English teacher who had a powerful influence on her career, her ways of thinking, and her teaching practices. She recalled with pleasure the classes this particular teacher taught, how the teacher modeled good teaching practice, encouraged her students to develop and how she shaped an academic community. Another teacher instantly recalled her grade six teacher, a person she really liked, and a high school teacher who enabled group work and fun. Likewise, another teacher remembered past experiences and, as she talked, she began to make connections between her understandings of physical education and English teaching, the assumptions she carried from one subject to another. "No one, not in twenty-six years, has ever asked me about these things!" she exclaimed. Yet another teacher referred to the influences of people he had met through his reading, textual voices that spoke to him and shaped his life.

We may have opportunities to talk about influential teachers, but often do not really address the specific influences. We often shy away from more personal influences such as family. Our moral and ethical understandings of life greatly shape our relationships with students, the structure of our lesson plans, our evaluation procedures and myriad other aspects of teaching.

A belief I hold sacred is that we should not be judged by our intellectual abilities, nor should we be judged by our economic status. I believe I am worthy even if I do not have wealthy parents, even if I do not write neatly and express my thoughts clearly. I believe that we all have worth, we all have talents even if our worth and talents have not yet been discovered. I believe that we should be judged by our actions, and that our actions should match our words. I believe that there is a "being" greater collectively than the sum of all of us individually.

Yet these are such personal aspects of our lives that we do not ask, do not talk about in casual conversation. However, outside observers may begin to see how our beliefs and values structure our

classrooms and cause us to make assumptions about our students and what they will teach them. The tone of our voice, the acknowledgment of student responses, the way we distribute materials, how the desks are arranged in the class, the grading practices we use, all indicate larger understandings of our teaching and ourselves. If we can uncover some of these assumptions and examine them, we can begin to control and shape them in ways that empower us and our students, ways that do not only change our day-to-day understandings but enable us to make fundamental changes that addressues such as racial and patriarchal dominance.

Assuming Evaluation Strategies

Teachers hold many assumptions that shape their teaching practices and classroom values. A crucial set of assumptions relates to the evaluation of our students' work. Traditionally, evaluation has been seen as the last step in the learning process -- students create a piece of work determined by the teacher, then hand it in to be "marked". This seems to be a logical progression -- until, that is, teachers begin to value more than the final product, and to examine what it is that we do indeed value. Anthony et al. (1994) suggest that as teachers we need to re-examine our evaluative practices of student work: "active learning requires active evaluation. In spite of the changing pattern of literacy learning and teaching, however, very little has changed by way of assessment and evaluation. Although teaching is changing, in many places evaluation is not" (p. 8). Once teachers begin to value learning processes as well as products, the nature and position of evaluation must be reconsidered. And as much as the elements of learning that come under evaluative scrutiny have changed, including journal writing, workshop approaches and portfolio development, most evaluation has remained as the final summative stage of the learning development.

If, as much of the research and classroom practice of language learning indicates, we have begun to value the processes of learning as well as the products, we must also begin to reconsider the place of

evaluation. We must reconsider the purposes and the methods of evaluation and develop a broader understanding of the processes of evaluation. "We have directed our attention towards developing more complex and sophisticated methods of evaluation, instead of interrogating and refining the methodology that drives these methods" (Lowe and Bintz, 1992, p. 16).

Our purposes and methods of evaluation are defined by the beliefs and values we hold as human beings. We have attempted to value the individuality of each student within the classroom and in a broader societal context by implementing journal writing, workshops, and portfolios. We attempt to hear the voice of each student in the classroom. We must then examine our assumptions about the role of evaluation and how evaluation supports and encourages learning. Evaluation must be consistent with what we know about learning. Is it possible to summatively evaluate process and progress of the learner? If so, we must find evaluative tools that will support our intents. If not, we must reconsider our evaluation tools entirely. It is with these thoughts that I began to work with five high school teachers in order to re-view our common and individual practices of evaluating students.

Uncovering Assumptions

We as teachers share many common unarticulated, and often unexamined, assumptions about evaluation. Although contradictory to other beliefs we may hold about learning, deeply embedded is a belief that "teachers know best." We have a great responsibility bestowed upon us, similar to a parental responsibility, to "give" our students knowledge. As teachers, we have experiences and knowledge that exceed the students' experiences and knowledge, and we attempt to give them as much as possible. We must make decisions for our students "for their own good" because we can foresee the future and need to prepare our students for it.

For example, we have tended to bring to our classrooms assumptions about the type of texts that all students should know in

order to be "educated." We are reluctant to overlook Shakespeare, Steinbeck, Wordsworth, Miller, Orwell, or any number of other of our literary favourites, believing that all students should have the same literary experiences, experiences that are also often similar to our own.

I recall a meeting of high school teachers several years ago where the topic of discussion was a newly-developed high school novel list to be approved by the department of education. There was heated discussion at suggestions to replace some titles with more current and global selections. There was strong feeling among the teachers present that we should not eliminate any of the "classics" that have become an integral part of a well-rounded education.

We also believe that all students, regardless of their direction after high school, need to be able to write coherent essays, creating a thesis statement, well-developed paragraphs, substantiated arguments, and using precise language. We would feel that we are doing our students a disservice if we do not attend to these elements of our disciplines.

Teachers often assume, as our teacher education and experience has supported, the nature of "students". We view students as being lacking, as having "less" than teachers. It is our responsibility to transfer knowledge to our students and then to test them on the amount of knowledge they have retained and understood. We sometimes have difficulty enabling our students to understand the importance of this knowledge.

"Why do I need to know this?" is a common question of frustrated students who struggle to connect our teacher knowledge with their own. However, as students prepare to write external examinations their question changes from "Why do I need to know this?" to "How do I get to know this?" They assume that the teachers are able to offer them guidance in being successful exam-writers and they interpret teachers' suggestions in the following ways: "She told me that I needed

to support my answers", "I have to try and write focussed", "Use proper format", "Keep on topic", "Use details and organize my writing".

The students' overall goal is to achieve a "good" mark, one that will enable them to feel successful, and they articulate avenues for improvement in the following ways: "I should have spent more time on the assignment", "I needed more thought and details", "The teacher expects at least half a page, to use quotes where possible, two drafts of the answer -- just to answer to the best of my ability", "I need to keep on topic", "I need to go back to the story more." Often the students assume that hard work and more time spent on the task will be a benefit and result in higher marks, and they have difficulty in specifically articulating how to develop their writing.

Teachers assume the responsibility of "preparing" students to write exams. As with the assumed need to study an accepted body of knowledge, we also assume that students need to be taught how to write exams. In addition to teaching them a subject area, we must also teach them test-writing skills. We feel a strong responsibility to our students to enable them to score highly on the tests, which will help them to feel successful and will prepare them for their futures.

All of the teachers who participated in this research focused for at least two weeks on exam preparation, attempting to instill in students a sense of confidence in their abilities and a knowledge of exam expectations. This preparation took several forms. There were "practice runs" of writing old exams, review of course materials, explanations given by teachers about marking procedures, and suggestions of possible texts and themes to "prepare", preparation that focused directly on the upcoming exam. As teachers assume a responsibility to prepare students, students also assume that the preparation is the teachers' responsibility. "Students expect teachers to be evaluative and judgmental, someone whose written comments would be no more meaningful than a checkmark or a pat two-word phrase" (Maas, 1991, p. 220). They look to their teachers to tell them the worth of their writing assignments.

Teachers generally believe that it is important to make assessment criteria "clear" in order that the students know what is expected of them. As Spandel and Stiggens (1990) suggest, "good assessment demands specific, clearly identified criteria. We have to know what it is we're looking for.... if the raters are using sound, thorough written criteria in assessing the papers, the quality and consistency of the feedback to the student writers far exceed what the classroom teacher can usually provide." (p. 2) As teachers, we sometimes look to a patriarchal authority that can tell us if we are right or wrong. We come to assume that we need to be checked and corrected to stay in line, to maintain acceptable standards. We assume that the judgements of outside evaluators should be valued over our judgements and expertise; or, if we do not accept that assumption, then that there is little we can do to change these perceptions of others.

I wonder, however, what "sound, thorough written criteria" looks like, and whether it is "sound and thorough" to the teacher both before and after the assignments are read. I wonder whether it is "sound and thorough" to the students. A classroom discussion between a student and a teacher reveals a struggle to develop a criteria that is useful and understandable to them both.

Student: Why did we get the marks we did? We just have a number, not the reasons why.

Teacher: Okay, do you ever, when you get these [evaluation sheets], go back to those sheets that give a description? Doesn't that tell you what you've done?

Student: It's not detailed enough. I want to know where, in my paper, you decided to give me that mark.

Although, as Spandel and Stiggens suggest, we assume that students who have been given scoring guides know what the scores mean and therefore extensive comments become less critical, that is not necessarily the case. As indicated in the conversation above, students

are not always able to connect scoring guides with their own marks. The objective and the personal do not connect for the student. The descriptors for the evaluative categories "thought and detail" (quality of unifying ideas; effective response to the question; clear development of response, by examples, specific details, analogies) were not detailed enough to enable the student to understand the reasons for her grade. Perhaps it is not possible to give "clear" enough descriptors when the student's overriding desire is to "do well", to be successful. Perhaps the very nature of language does not enable communication that accounts for interpretations that are influenced by both the teacher's desires and the student's desires.

Student Assignments Revealing Teacher Assumptions

How often is it that we only "clearly" know what we're looking for after we have read the students' assignments, a clearness that comes as we are able to recognize and articulate that which we are not looking for? And should we do not ask ourselves if our own clarity (which upon examination is not entirely free from obstruction) is shared by our students?

I recall many instances of marking students' assignments, using detailed criteria that I had set out in advance of the assignment and shared with the students. I had assumed that the students were aware of my expectations, and was often disappointed that they had not "measured up" to those expectations. I also recall completing the various categories of the evaluation – content, organization, style, correctness -- and after adding up the numbers, reassessing the evaluation in some or all of the categories in order to make the final grade more in line with my overall impression of the work, my first sense of the grade that the paper deserved.

"By far the commonest method of assessing pupils' writing is by 'impression marking'. That is, the teacher takes a piece of writing, reads it, may well make a comment or two in the margin, and at the end makes a fairly rapid decision on what numerical or literal grade should be allotted" (Gannon, 1985, p.61). Gannon's observation is born

out by the evaluative methods demonstrated by the teachers I worked with, as well as many instances of evaluating in my own teaching.

Most teachers try to be as straightforward in giving written evaluation criteria as possible. However, in the attempt to be specific and detailed we may be restricting and limiting some of our students. We assume that all students want clear directions, but perhaps not all students need the same degree of specificity. Teachers continually struggle with the issue of fairness: in our attempt to give students direction and expectations, one teacher expressed concern, wondering whether we give too much instruction, encouraging students to follow instructions rather than to make decisions on their own. Perhaps we are not giving students enough scope for learning, enough credit for being able to complete tasks on their own. Perhaps, as in the earlier exchange between teacher and student, specificity does not help the students anyway.

Teachers often assume that students will not do their assignments unless there is a "mark" given at the end of their efforts. We see exams as ways of "focusing" the students; exams are seen by the students as the "main purpose" of the course. We assume that students do not have a personal desire to learn about history or biology or literature but that we have to provide external motivators for them. One teacher commented that because of the final exam, the students have a "focus point" -- the exam gives students a purpose for reading the assigned literature.

If, indeed, the students are "motivated" only by external rewards such as high grades and positive recognition, we need to be wary of any assumption that students will speak their honest thoughts and opinions. Driven as they are by a desire to succeed and to please the teacher, it is very difficult for students to become vulnerable by "revealing" their true thoughts and opinions. Although we assume that by giving students opportunities to express their personal ideas and opinions we are encouraging them to develop strong and clear voice, we may just be asking them to learn new rules to the old game, "What

does she want?" We enable and encourage students to write "personal responses" in journals and we assure our students that they will not be judged "right" or "wrong". However, if students respond only to external motivators (such as grades) there will be little incentive for them to complete personal responses that are not rewarded with a grade.

We also assume that, if students spend time to complete an assignment, we owe them the courtesy of grading their work. We do not consider whether the time spent by the teacher (x 25 or 30 or 35 students) will be of value to the students' learning processes as much as we feel a sense of obligation to give students our "feedback" and judgment on each assignment. And if the actual assignment has not led the student to productive learning, we can assume that the students have incorrectly interpreted the criteria. Christenbury (1994) suggests that "a teacher who reads with exhaustive thoroughness may not find his or her efforts yielding a commensurate student improvement" (p. 192).

Again, an incident springs to my mind. I recall a teacher showing me the product of her laborious efforts, marking each of her students' essays with thoroughness and exactitude. There were red marks all over the paper, so many that the original work was obscured. She bemoaned the fact that students rarely paid attention to her corrections and comments and focused only on the grade assigned.

How, then, can a teacher's efforts be more usefully directed? What efforts on the part of the teacher will help the students to learn and develop?

Recognizing and Examining our Assumptions

Missing from recent literature, suggest Spandel and Stiggins (1989), is any form of analysis of the underlying assumptions and philosophies teachers use in the grading process. Also missing is a summary of the actual practices teachers use to generate grades: the

student characteristics they use, the measurement procedures they use, their rules of evidence, or the standards they apply. And in those studies in which teachers' grading practices have been documented, none have attempted to examine individual teachers' beliefs (Frary, Cross, Webger, 1992). I wish to more closely examine the underlying assumptions and beliefs held by teachers that shape their evaluative practices and their teaching practices.

Tobin (1991) suggests that "we should pay more careful attention to the research and experience of psychotherapists... it makes no sense to ignore lessons from the field in which workings of the unconscious and the subtle dynamics of dyad relationships have been carefully and systematically analyzed" (p. 340). "The teacher's function," he suggests, "is to lead students to adopt the teacher's values, the common criteria of good writing shared by the teacher and the English profession and, with certain variations, to educate people in general. The therapist's function is to lead clients to clarify or develop their own individual values" (p. 340). He further suggests that, "As teachers we also can go no further than our own complexes and internal resistances permit, and thus we, too, need to begin with self-analysis... to identify the extent to which our responses to our students and their writing are not neutral or objective" (p. 341). If, as Haug (1987) suggests, our past experiences offer insight into the ways we construct ourselves into existing relations, we must find ways to recognize our past experiences as meaningful. By writing stories of our rememberings and by sharing with a supportive group, we can come to trace "linkages that appear new and exciting, but at the same time are recognizable to the group as credible since they form part of all of our memories" (p. 54).

"Writing is a transgression of boundaries, an exploration of new territory. It involves making public the events of our lives, wriggling free of the constraints of purely private and individual experiences. From a state of modest insignificance we enter a space in which we can take ourselves seriously. As an alternative to accepting everyday events mindlessly, we recall them in writing" (Haug, p. 36). We have

the opportunity to reevaluate and to question what we have always taken for granted.

If teachers do not have opportunities to re-evaluate and question our taken-for-granted assumptions we can enshrine a set of unarticulated assumptions into what McLaren (1986) calls "ritual" -- forms of enacted meaning which enable social actors to frame, negotiate and articulate their ... existence as social, cultural, and moral beings. "Teachers employ controlling rituals of reward and punishment to compel students to perform well" (p. xv).

I have known teachers to implement an elaborate system of positive points and negative points that are awarded to students for "good" behaviour and "good" work. The result of achieving a number of points was a pizza party, "free" time, or a special outing. Similar results – "good" behaviour and "good" work – can be attained through external motivators such as comments and grades written on the students' work, grades that encourage students to "perform well", to continually seek for the responses valued and rewarded by the teacher.

Rituals are embedded in the framework of private and institutional life, helping shape our perceptions of daily life and how we live it. These rituals implicitly shape our classroom activities, and can conceal/obscure our view of other possibilities. McLaren (1986) asks how rituals (such as those of evaluation) tacitly shape the learning process and influence the values held by students. It may be possible for teachers to better understand their assumptions once they have examined existing rituals performed in their classrooms.

Teachers have heard the rhetoric of the importance of evaluation many times, so often that they can repeat it mindlessly: evaluation gives students "feedback" as to how they have done on an assignment (measuring up to a set of criteria or standards) -- *[it tells them what they have done wrong]*; it identifies strengths and weaknesses so that the teacher can plan and guide the pupil in future work -- *[it tells them what they have done wrong again]*; evaluation informs parents about their

child's progress -- *[it tells parents what they have done wrong]*; it helps to select pupils for courses in the next years -- *[it tells them what courses they will not be able to handle in the future]*; informs employers and further education institutions about the progress, achievements, and attitudes of the pupils; helps teachers to "get to know" the pupil; and to get the pupil to assess him[her]self -- *[so the student can easily recognize what she/he has not been able to do well]*. (Lowe and Bintz,1992; Chater, 1984).

This rhetoric by and large means that teachers collect data that confirm their beliefs about the students' abilities and enable them to support their beliefs to parents and students. Part of the rhetoric of evaluation includes what Anthony et al. (1991) call "myths" about evaluation; "misconceptions that have grown out of traditional assessment and evaluation practices" (p. 12). Educational myths perpetuate ideas that are passed from generation to generation of educators and are only substantiated by our own desire for them to exist; they provide protection from the sometimes untenable messiness of evaluation. Some of these myths suggested by Anthony et al included the following: 1) assessment and evaluation are separate from instruction; 2) language is learned hierarchically, therefore it should be tested sequentially; 3) evaluation is testing; 4) standardized tests are objective measures of performance (objectivity is a myth); 5) tests determine appropriate grade levels for children; 6) teacher observations are neither valid nor reliable; and 7) outsiders know better than teachers and parents about the progress of children. These assumptions prevent teachers from developing confidence in their own abilities to assess their students' work and progress. They also prevent a questioning attitude to their own practices and practices of the system in general.

According to Manke and Lloyd, however, (in Kushnerik, 1994), teachers suggest <u>two</u> basic beliefs about evaluation: 1) grades are important as a means of communication and provide opportunities for students to self-evaluate and self-reflect; and 2) teachers should consider the individual needs of the student when assigning grades.

Although these beliefs are focused on the individual student and her/his needs, they ignore the larger societal issues such as the impersonal nature of standardized testing and growing demands from the larger community for "accountability ". How, then, are teachers to understand their personal value to their students and their roles as evaluators, roles which often conflict with each other?

Researching Collectively

I have attempted to establish a role for myself in working with five high school teachers, one that does not create conflict, so that I might examine the nature of evaluation in school. This has been difficult for me. In attempting to create for myself a persona of collaborative researcher I have had to leave my evaluator-self behind. This is often more difficult than it would first seem, as my own beliefs and values immediately shape my responses to situations and to people. In much the same way as teachers themselves must do, I have had to attempt to consciously shed initial assumptions I have brought to situations in order to view with more distance and "objective" understandings. However, as I re-present the teachers that I have worked with, I realize that their views are represented through words and images that I have selected and joined together, and that my evaluator self has not been left entirely behind. The data collection for this research has been derived from my observations and conversations with various teachers. I have threaded together events that I have experienced in the context of the teachers in their classrooms and their school.

My writing evoked individual and varied responses from the teacher participants. Each of the teachers participated in this project for unique reasons, for personal/professional growth, for affirmation, for community, for the purpose of informing me in my quest(ioning). Two of the teachers were eager to consider alternative perceptions to their practices and understandings of evaluation. Two of the teachers were not as open to engaging in conversations that questioned the aspects of their belief and value structures upon which teaching practices are based. The fifth teacher became involved in other

professional activities during the course of this project and was therefore not actively involved throughout the entire term. It is the two teachers who were most engaged in questioning their own evaluative practices that I have developed into the case studies which follow.

I have attempted to portray the assumptions of these two teachers through case studies that represent their views and understandings of teaching and show how teachers' assumptions become socialized. Their own practices are often indicative of ways in which they understand their own teaching in general and their own subject specifically. Thus one teacher's practices focus upon literature and language as vehicles for ideas and for living, and on bodies of important literary works, while another teacher's focus is upon competence in communication, clarity for understanding and placing historical events. I attempt in the following studies to begin to examine the assumptions that these teachers bring to their understanding of teaching and how these assumptions shape their teaching and evaluating practices.

Case Studies

Kerry

Kerry's classroom is usually organized in clusters of four or five desks. The students come in to the room chatting, and continue the chatting until Kerry asks them to take their seats, indicating that she is ready for class to begin. Often the students include Kerry in their discussions, or stop to ask her specific questions before taking their seats. When class begins, there is a sense of expectation in this class, a readiness for the unexpected to happen. The students take the cue from Kerry's actions and words, just as she takes a cue from the students.

Kerry teaches "despite" her planning -- she is open to ideas and directions that arise spontaneously, either from her or from her students. There is a great deal of Kerry as a person in her teaching;

she teaches from herself, her interests, her understandings, to her students. She attempts to "find a balance between personalizing learning, teacher time, and external pressures" such as evaluation. There is an assumption made here that she is important as a person in the classroom, but also that each student is important in the classroom.

There is another, more hidden assumption present here. External demands, such as diploma exams, exist, must exist, and there is nothing teachers can do to change that. Teachers owe their students the opportunity to succeed on these exams and within these structures, so this often overrides what teachers do in the class. Kerry often feels considerable pressure from her students, and more subtlely from her colleagues, to teach in the same way as all the other English teachers, to give "regular" essay assignments and notes. She often finds it difficult to meet these challenges head on, as she is not always entirely confident of her approaches. Therefore, she attempts to assimilate traditional assignments and teaching approaches with her more progressive activity-based approaches.

As a feminist teacher, she brings her ideas to her students, challenges them with new and often uncomfortable ideas. As the students come to understand the play Hamlet they also are encouraged to think about the story from new perspectives. After giving a brief synopsis of the first scene, she poses a question for her students - "what if this had not been a male-dominated world?" "How many of you would want to be king?" None of the young women respond positively, but several of the young men show considerable keenness.

Kerry then asks the class to consider the other possibilities for high-status women during the time period -- they could be the queen, or a noble's wife. Totally reliant on their husbands, they would hope he was not too horrible, or that he died too soon and left her to her own resources. She would then have to search for another husband to support her or, if fate was not kind to them, she could resort to becoming a nun or a prostitute. So, then, how many of you would wish

to become noble's wives? nuns? prostitutes? The students were then positioned in class as they would have been in court (or excluded from the court), and they took part in a role-play scenario.

After further discussion and some laughter, the question was posed again. "How many of you would want to be king?" This time, there were two young women who were interested in the position as well as some of the young men in the class. The students were not particularly comfortable with this activity, and some of the young men tried to disguise their discomfort and dismiss it with jokes. Kerry, however, addressed their jokes with seriousness and made it clear to them that the issue was one of importance to her -- and should be to them. She assumed here the role not only of teacher but also of conscience, provoking and stirring up ideas that had not been previously brought to light. Throughout the discussion of female roles in Hamlet, it becomes apparent that Kerry has a great deal of knowledge of the play as well as many opinions. This knowledge gives her a legitimacy that enables her to move the discussion elsewhere; students are confident in her ability to teach the play seriously as well as to diverge from the traditional.

In the Hamlet unit there were several assignments, including: 1) a reader response journal; 2) a series of worksheets, quizzes, memory work and mini assignments; 3) a unit exam; 4) an essay; 5) a group assignment summarizing an act, and 6) a film section, including a film review. The reader response journal, in which students were asked to "record your impressions, thoughts, feelings, and questions about the play. One response for each act. This will also include quotes from each act that strike you as important and a discussion of 'why'" was a highly successful activity and enabled the students to think about the play in-depth. However, Kerry still felt an obligation to give worksheets, unit exams, and essays so that the students could "prove" their understandings. The pressure to return to "safer" territory in teaching and evaluating was constantly present.

The students in Kerry's classes, English 10, 23, and 30, were continually involved in presentations, projects, and activities. In groups, the grade 10 students selected a short story to teach to the rest of the class. The English 23 students were involved in role-playing the development of culture after being stranded on a deserted island -- a lead-up to Lord of the Flies. The English 30 students wrote and presented coffee-house poetry to their peers. Students in each of the classes were encouraged to express their ideas and develop their own voices. Class control was continually relinquished by the teacher and given over to the students.

The activities I observed presented a wide variety of learning opportunities, opportunities to read, analyze, write, role-play, speak, listen, evaluate, create.... and yet, Kerry still spoke of getting down to "serious" work. The serious work she spoke of involved teacher-directed work, where she would present "important" information to students, notes on plays and genres, discussion of how to write an effective diploma exam. This assumption, buried under a mound of desires and interests that shaped Kerry's classes, causes her to continually feel uneasy and to "pull back" to safer territory.

Lively and provocative discussion is a large part of the classroom activity in Kerry's classes. The room is filled with talk. Kerry does not discourage individual students from talking with her before and after class, she herself shares personal opinions and anecdotes, and builds in many opportunities for students to learn from each other in groups and whole class discussions. There is an expectation that students and their ideas will be challenged, and an assumption that this is a good thing.

As an English teacher, Kerry expresses the desire to enable all of her students to clearly communicate and express themselves in a wide variety of situations. She structures the class activities to enable her students to enjoy literature and learn about people and life from literature, to personalize the stories in some way. Kerry presents a wide variety of films to her classes, relating themes from film to

themes in the literature, hoping to bring current issues to bear on the students' understanding of classical works of literature. She grapples with the challenge of teaching her students about life, preparing them for an uncertain future. At the same time she is learning herself, about herself and her students. Because conversation is valued in her classes, she opens herself to both agreement and dissension.

As Kerry was preparing a particular film unit for her English 23 class, she selected a variety of films that she thought would be important for the students to see, to broaden their horizons and form the basis for future discussion. She showed one particular film, throughout which the students looked obviously bored. Halfway through the film the students verbalized their feelings, so Kerry stopped the film to explain why she had made her selections, that she wanted them to be exposed to some "quality" films as well as the -- she implied -- "junk" that they regularly watched. They protested. They knew quality film and regularly watched it. "Name some," Kerry challenged them. They did. They listed many films that they (and critics) considered quality and they were also able to explain why these films were good. Kerry at this point realized that her assumption about the students' abilities and understandings was in need of further examination.

Our assumptions can be challenged sometimes when they are least ready for the challenge. The label attached to students, whether it be academic, non-academic, challenged, "23", "20AP", can sometimes blur our understanding of the students behind the label. Towards the end of the year Kerry was faced with a class that she had come to dread. Eight o'clock in the morning, English 23, a group of students she had struggled to understand all term. She had offered them donuts if they came to class, given them interesting projects, brought in various films throughout the term, and she thought it was to little avail. On this particular morning it was warm and they were tired. A film that had been promised them was unavailable, so they were given time to read.

Sixty minutes to read is not a treat for these students, and they were very vocal in their responses. Kerry threatened that the alternative would be grammar worksheets, and to this threat they surprisingly responded positively. They would much rather do worksheets than read. So Kerry responded by providing a worksheet on comma splices they were to complete before the end of the class. The class' response was astoundingly positive. "Can we work with a partner?" "No." The students then went to work, relatively quietly, completing the worksheet for about thirty minutes.

During that time I had a chance to talk with Kerry. As an outside observer I had been able to see a liveliness and capacity to learn in these students that had not been tainted by the frustrations of poor attendance, assignments not completed and negative attitudes. I was able to remind Kerry of their good qualities and also point to the attentiveness they were giving to the comma splice activitiy just assigned. When she returned to the students, she was able to approach them more positively. Kerry "corrected" the worksheet with them and what ensued was a very lively and interested discussion about why comma splices were not desirable, various possibilities for correcting comma splices, how the choices affected the writing style, and what their personal preferences were in writing. The students showed both intuitive and explicit knowledge of language through their comments and suggestions. The assumptions that students would view this activity with distaste and that they would not be able to understand the implications of it were in need of reexamination. Because these students had different needs and desires than the "academic" stream students, Kerry again made the assumption that they were not capable or interested in their learning. She wanted the students to be "serious" about the work that she valued.

As teachers we believe that it is important to communicate to students the criteria by which an assignment is to be evaluated, as clearly and thoroughly as possible. They assume that this is possible. Kerry, however, realized the difficulty in giving "clear" criteria for an assignment when she gave the assignment to two different classes.

She explained the assignment and gave the criteria to the first class at the end of the class. She then had the opportunity to explain the assignment to the second group at the beginning of the class. As they asked her questions about the assignment, Kerry realized that perhaps the directions were not as "clear" as she had supposed. She was able to elaborate and adapt the assignment in response to her students' questions. She then had to go back to the first class and give them the same opportunity.

On another occasion, Kerry gave the following assignment:

> **Write a personal response to the play *Rosencrantz and Guilderstern Are Dead.***
>
> **Discuss the extent to which the play *Rosencrantz and Guilderstern* is a true reflection of the plight and therefore the tragedy of twentieth century man. Use the notes you received prior to the video.**
>
> **Write a draft, then share it with your colleagues. You need to find two editors, and then you will rewrite it after the weekend.**
>
> **20 marks - 10 marks for content (thought and detail)**
> **- 10 marks for composition (correctness)**

As I was observing the class at this time, I asked Kerry why she was giving equal marks for thought and for correctness, since it was a personal response (although I did not question her on her use of twentieth century *man*). My question also revealed my assumptions about personal writing. She responded, after a moment's thought, by changing the weighting to 15 marks for content and 5 marks for composition. A common question from the students is, "Is this what you want?" -- a valid question when they consider the amorphous nature of our criteria, yet a difficult one for teachers to answer. We

often only realize the nature of our assignments and our desired outcomes when we see them completed by the students, when we see the possibilities realized in the students' writing.

On yet another occasion, the class had been divided into groups of three or four, instructed to select a short story and prepare to teach it to the entire class. The first group to present seemed rather disorganized and not prepared. Kerry said to me, "What should I do? Should I let them continue or stop it and show them how a presentation should look?" After a few minutes of stumbling through the presentation, Kerry decided to stop the group. "Girls, I'm going to ask you to sit down. Let me review what you should do. Before class you are to come in and be sure you are prepared to go. Part of your mark is on organization. You must take ownership of your presentation. Tell the name of the story, give a focus for your presentation, provide an agenda. I'm marking on content, creativity, organization, and organizational skills and pacing."

She then suggested that all groups get together again to finalize their plans, and wrote on the board this criteria:

Content	**- story analysis**
	- handbook
Creativity	**- unique approach**
Oral	**- eye contact**
	- voice
	- physical

She later discussed the presentations with each group individually, and further expanded the criteria in these discussions. "Be sure you do not blend into the chalkboard." "Be sure to have variety." Although they outline specific criteria to guide the students, it is not always simple to convey our exact expectations to the students; it is not always easy to articulate these criteria even to ourselves. We as teachers are always "in process" and struggling to attain a final product that

resembles our imaginary teacher, the unattainable ideal we strive to reproduce.

Phillip

Phillip has been teaching social studies in Edmonton high schools for twenty-nine years and during that time he has continually attempted to develop helping relationships with his students. He attempts to make connections with his students, especially those in need of his help, through their written work. His comment of "Please see me" on students' work indicates his desire to talk to his students, to help them become more successful in their assignments. His approach to student/teacher conferencing is an informal one, and the students have a choice in whether to attend the conference or not. "For five years I have conferenced with students, and I know it does good. From September to June growth is evident." Through the conferences he holds with his students, Phillip is able to hear what his students think. An underlying assumption to this belief is that students will be frank with him and will honestly express their views and feelings, not just say what they think he wants to hear. Although Phillip attempts to develop a warm and open relationship with his students, they are often reluctant to reveal their personal views in a school context for fear of looking foolish. Therefore, they play the school game and try to tell the teacher what they have determined he wants to hear.

Phillip is concerned that each of his students have room and opportunity to grow throughout the year in his class. "Every kid can write an essay, can communicate their ideas clearly" and Phillip tells the story of Donald, an autistic student in Social Studies 23. "With a little bit of help Donald was able to write a paragraph -- I try to keep it simple -- it was not superb but I could understand it." An obvious assumption on Phillip's part is that all students are valued and valuable. There is also another assumption here, I think, that writing, writing paragraphs and writing essays, is an important skill for life, and that all students should develop (if not master) the skill. It is not mastery of the particular skill that Phillip values as much as the

students' continual attempts to improve and develop. Phillip sees that it is much better when students can grow, and he offers a metaphor of learning to ride a bicycle. When a child is learning, she skins her knees, but she keeps trying, and eventually she learns. Phillip values the persistence that students show in learning skills, and seems to suggest that there is pain involved in learning and developing. Phillip tries not to give "0" for any assignment but rather encourages each student to complete the work assigned. He sees the attempts as important parts of the learning process, and also values the "work ethic" of making an attempt, or many attempts.

Phillip assumes that the ideas and questions of each of his students are valuable and worth sharing, an assumption that he demonstrates through the class arrangement and organization. There are two rows of student desks on each side of the room, all of them facing in towards the middle. Phillip often stands in the centre of the class between the two sets of rows, and the overhead projector is also positioned between the rows. The students are able to clearly see Phillip when he is directing the class, and they are also able to easily see and interact with each other. When students are directed to complete a written activity there is often ongoing informal conversation, both with Phillip and with each other. The students engage in their learning through conversation. They question conflicting "facts" in different text sources, check for clarification of information, look for further understanding by way of maps, other texts, and Phillip.

Throughout the courses he teaches, Phillip strives to enable his students to experience success. He provides structured activity sheets that clearly outline the theme of the unit, the issues to be addressed, and the questions to be answered in order to understand the theme. One activity addresses the question "Did World War I enhance Canada's stature as a nation?" The activity is then structured as follows:

THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR

1. What was the alliance system?

2. What was the Balkan Crisis? What triggered the fighting in World War I?

3. How did Canada enter the war?

4. What countries belonged together to form the two opposing sides in World War I?

CANADIANS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

1. What were the sacrifices made at

a) Ypres

b) Vimy Ridge

c) Passchendaele

2. How did the world react to Canada's sacrifices? How did the sacrifices enhance Canada's autonomy?

3. Briefly describe trench warfare.

4. When did the war end?

CANADA AT THE PEACE CONFERENCE

1. What role did Canada have at the Peace Conference?

2. How was Canada's membership in the League of Nations a recognition of Canada's stature?

Phillip worries, however, that the bright students are being penalized by being provided with such a structure -- and is possibly assuming, albeit implicitly, that only the very bright students deserve, or can handle, choices. Phillip worries about the excess of structure for himself as well. "Sometimes as a teacher I focus on the 'right answers' rather than on the questions -- sometimes the curriculum gets in the way." The imposition of written curriculum is often assumed to be the force that drives teachers and students in the curriculum, although Phillip questions that assumption. "In our hurry to teach the curriculum, teachers sometimes ignore a teachable moment, and do not go with the flow. Sometimes when a kid seems off topic, it may be

on topic for them." In our hurry to teach the curriculum, teachers often ignore the students who "do not fit in" to the educational system, students who are bright and capable, but who have different learning strengths than the ones valued in the system.

Phillip talks about meeting some of these students when he taught night school. However, although student success is important to Phillip, he had no particular thought of changing the structure of the system in order to help these students succeed. The assumption made was that these students needed to learn how to succeed within the existing system. The structure of curriculum sometimes imposes its force on to the teacher and students, the very weight of it creating assumptions of its importance.

The students in Phillip's classes frequently complete written assignments in the form of paragraph answers and essays. Writing is valued as a way of coming to terms with the ambiguities of historical and social issues. At the same time, Phillip spends considerable time developing a test bank of multiple choice questions from which to create class tests. This time spent suggests a value being placed on the "objective" knowledge that can be tested through multiple choices exams, perhaps contradicting the message he gives to students through his written assignments. An assignment in which the students were asked to memorize and rewrite a poem "In Flanders Fields" also suggests a valuing of immediately accessible knowledge that can be quoted readily, recall as well as interpretation being considered a valuable skill.

An assumption is made, when conferencing with students, that both parties in the conversation -- the teacher and the student -- have the same understandings and language. However, teacher's comments regarding their students' writing are not always clearly interpreted by the students. Some students have understood Phillip's comments in the following ways: "To do better, stick to one topic." "I have no idea how to improve -- I write the same way in English and get 80s." "He's a stern marker; he's hard on spelling mistakes." "I put lots of

information, maybe I don't organize well enough." and "...he lets us express our opinions.... to a point ... but he doesn't like it too personal." These student interpretations of Phillip's comments show a sense of the meaning, but not a strong understanding of how to develop and change the next assignment. The assumption that conversations are two way exchanges of information is not always born out by the students' comments.

That competition does and should exist in education and it is a positive feature of classrooms is an often hidden assumption. It is perhaps one that all teachers are not entirely comfortable with but one they are not always able to question. Competition remains a societal fact of life. It is assumed, then, that we as teachers need to prepare our students for the "reality" of life. Even in activities where Phillip attempts to provide opportunities for his students to learn from each other in a non-threatening manner, such as reading and learning from each others' essays, there are aspects of the assignment that includes ranking each others' work. In one particular activity , students are asked to identify "best" essays from a random group and rank them "objectively."

Emerging Assumptions

Assumptions that individual teachers bring to their classrooms shape their educational practices in explicit and subtle ways, making their classrooms individual and unique. Assumptions that begin to emerge as teachers reveal their beliefs and values through their practices relate to the ways in which students are viewed by the teachers. What is the place and position of the students in the classroom? How do we understand our relationships with students? Are students intended to be the receivers of information, or is the relationship more complex than that? The assumptions relating to students take on more and more importance as we continue to examine the nature of the evaluations we make of our students.

Other assumptions are collective as well as individual. One assumption that became evident over the course of several months was that the "system" was too powerful to actively resist, although many system directives were not palatable to the teachers. Like the high school students, passive resistance became one of the ways to cope with overwhelming demands and expectations. Some of the teachers stopped attending meetings. A specific example of system control was the imposition of a new report card, one the teachers found to 1) say very little, 2) be imposed from "above," and 3) use comments that showed the teachers in a very poor light. The teachers felt they had very little voice or control in the design of a new report card that they were forced to use. However, their frustrations remained unexpressed.

Our assumptions are largely unexamined. We have not the time nor the energy to actively reflect upon large educational issues in our struggle to keep abreast of the demands. Our own personal assumptions are battered into a collective understanding that we are not to be trusted to teach our students effectively and therefore must have external "experts" check up on us. We come to assume that external examinations are necessary in order to develop and maintain "standards". We assume that we must "prepare" our students to write external examinations, and that we will be held "accountable" if we are not "successful". We assume that it is not good to be too discrepant or to be different and we feel pressured to value qualities that are identified by external evaluating agencies.

We generally have in our minds an impression of a "good student" -- the student who possesses all the qualities that the educational system values, such as organization, responsibility, "self-motivation", and positive attitude. However, in light of the previous story, we can wonder if "good" students exist, whether we can allow them to exist in reality rather than in our imaginations. When we superimpose these attributes on the successful, enjoyable, witty, intelligent students who exist in our classes, we might find little correlation between the two sets of characteristics. We might need to

more clearly articulate what qualities we really value in students in our classes, rather than allowing our unarticulated assumptions to shape our values and our choices.

We still hold a set of shared assumptions, although unexamined, that keep us hopeful and enthusiastic in our teaching. We believe that education is valuable, necessary for our individual and collective strength. We believe that there is a body of knowledge that should be common to all students, that literature can open doors for us and offer new insights to life, that great literary and historical figures can give us insights that will better prepare us for our futures. We believe that assessment is a valid educational activity.

If we want to find less constrained and constraining ways of responding as writing teachers, we have to examine our responses within the contexts of the relationships in which they occur. "By engaging in ongoing self-analysis, by becoming more self-conscious about the source of our misreadings, by recognizing that our unconscious associations are a significant part of a writing course, we can become more creative readers and more effective teachers. By avoiding this process, we will never know in what ways we are limiting our students, their writing, and ourselves (Tobin, 1991). We need to give life to our unarticulated assumptions so that we may give our educational and evaluative practices unique and thoughtful identity.

However, there are considerable challenges facing us as we attempt to create our teaching/learning world from the chaos that whirls around us. We need to come to an awareness of the forces that continually pull us in many directions at once, threatening to capture us in its vortex.

5

Trapped in the

missed (mess)ages

of evaluation

dilemmas

dilemma *di-, di-lem e, n* a position where each of two alternative courses (or of all the feasible courses) is eminently undesirable; (loosely) a predicament, problem; a form of argument in which the maintainer of a certain proposition is committed to accept one of two propositions each of which contradicts his or her original contention (the argument was called a 'horned syllogism', and the victim compared to [a person] certain to be impaled on one or other of the horns of an infuriated bull, hence the **horns of a dilemma**; logic). [L, from Gr *dilemma*, from *di-* twice, double and *lemma* an assumption, from *lambanein* to take] (Chambers Dictionary, 1994)

Caught in Messy Situations: Roles of Teachers, Roles of Assessment

Daily there are tensions in my classroom, tensions brought about by decisions made under pressure, without reflection of consequences. Tensions caused by conflicting desires and ideologies. I am pulled, and pull my students, in many ways. Yet at the same time I feel stuck, not able to move in directions I choose. I attempt to provide a comfortable learning environment, one in which we are all comfortable.

The students have asked if they can listen to the radio or their walkmans during writing workshop. "No!" I want to shout. "You'll never be able to concentrate." I would not be able to concentrate, I know that it is helpful to some writers to listen to music while they are writing. But equally as distracting to others. So, "Yes to walkmans." Unfair to students who cannot afford walkmans, but what other choices? Student choice takes on a very different meaning when there are twenty-five students.

Whose voice becomes dominant, whose is subsumed? What activities are useful in writing workshop? What are not? This workshop is structured by me, the teacher, carefully selecting the best alternatives to enable the students to write productively, carefully deciding what is best for my students. I decide which activities are "effective" and which are "effectless". I am caught, sometimes, between my roles -- classroom manager and writing coach. Some students have indicated that they cannot write in a noisy classroom, so we have agreed on a "no talking" rule during writing time.

But I just need to ask Amanda a word.

No talking.

Can I just share this line with Robin? -- it's my favourite.

No talking.

I need to get some ideas for my story.

I said, no talking!

What has happened to my classroom as a friendly, warm, and comfortable place for writing?

Some days work magically. The tensions balance and we dance through the afternoon. We are synchronized, in unison. Poetry is written, parodies are sung, stories are told in a hush of expectation. We celebrate our learning. There are other days where the door slams shut. I stumble early on in the program, step on numerous toes, dance a solo in my classroom. I read a student's work with expectation and am disappointed. This is not what I had in mind! How can she have been so obtuse? I say to myself. What have I done wrong? she asks, and I stumble again, trying to articulate kindly, trying not to trod too heavily on her toes. And somewhere inside I am annoyed, knowing that she will not take my knowledgeable advice anyway.

I leave the class wishing I were the kind of teacher that students really listened to, and that when I spoke, they would do as they were told. I am the teacher, after all. I need more conviction.

Where is their respect for my knowledge and experience? When I ask for their opinions, they get it all wrong anyway. I should stop asking for opinions, and just tell them how to do it right. That is what the students are always hoping for anyway.

Why, I reflect, does it appear so easy for some teachers to speak authoritatively and have students accept their words? Hand in assignments exactly as they were required, accept assigned grades without questioning? But the image leaves me feeling uneasy, tense. I know I don't really want my students to be this way. So what do I want?

I have been teaching in classrooms for eighteen years and I am still asking the same question of myself. I have known the answer in a broad sense for many years, but have yet to work out all of the details. The circumstances of my decisions keep shifting, keeping me continually on uneven ground. I have learned to balance on uneven ground, even to dance. But there is constant tension.

I am not alone in my dilemma. Many teachers feel the strains of being pulled in many directions, often without realizing the sources of the strain. As an outside observer in a high school for a year, I have been able to feel and see some of the tensions that teachers daily face.

Many-Faceted Perspectives -- Distorting

In a high school teacher's class, students have written "position papers" for Social Studies and then handed them in to the teacher. He now intends for the students to review and "rate" each of the papers so that they might learn from each other. He divides the students into groups of four or five and given as many papers for their group to assess and rank. Students have no background, no measure for

comparison for their own writing, the teacher explains, so he enables them to read the work of their peers. He hopes that by reading a variety of their peers' work, his students will be able to see new possibilities and to feel good about their own progress.

The students view this task in a very serious and responsible manner, taking time to read and discuss the merits and weaknesses of each paper amongst themselves, ranking them and returning them to the teacher in order of their perceived merit. The teacher then takes all of the first ranked papers from each group and gives them to one group, all the second ranked papers and gives them to another group, and so on. The groups repeat the same process, again ranking the papers from best to weakest. The final result is that the entire group of papers are ranked by the class from first to last. What do the students gain from this activity? As the teacher had hoped, the students have the opportunity to read a wide variety of their peers' papers, to see alternative ways of writing and to compare other papers to their own.

From this perspective the activity is successful. However, the students then also have to face the difficulty of being ranked, the difficulty of dealing with receiving a low ranking in the class. From this perspective the students may learn no more than the fact that there are many students in the class who can write better than they can, and that they are once again "failures". They may also learn that assessing papers is relatively simple based on the readers' unarticulated impression of the work, or that the students who generally do well have again achieved a top ranking.

This activity, then, has been developed for the best of reasons by the teacher, but the messages to the students are definitely mixed and unclear. Perhaps they will be able to learn from the reading of other papers, but we never know what it is that they learn. Are they learning ways of writing better, ways of expressing ideas better, or are they learning something more subtle and implicit? Are they able to see themselves as "not that bad" or are they instead viewing themselves as "not that good"? How do we as teachers know what they are learning?

In another class students have been studying the play Hamlet. They considered the question, "How would you react to the ghost, given the shocks you have had?" The students have moved their desks into a circle, and have been encouraged by the teacher to discuss the question openly. They are, however, hesitant to offer their views. The frustrations for the teacher are evident, the desire to develop a conversation that would open up the play through the question posed being blocked by the students' lack of background knowledge and their fears of looking foolish. The teacher waits for a couple of students to respond, then directs them back to the text for the "answers". She offers several quotes to help them answer the question and makes reference to the Shakespearean stage to help them answer the question. At the end of the class discussion, a follow-up homework assignment is given with some suggestions about how to do the assignment thoroughly. "Come on, we're all aiming for 100% on Part A of the exam" was the teacher's parting comment.

The students have gained considerable background knowledge about the play through the class work. They have been left thinking about the play from new and broader perspectives. They might also have learned that the teacher has the answers, and that they must work to uncover the answers from the text or from the teacher. Their own responses and voices are immature and not very important. They have learned that the work they do is for the sake of a final exam.

In a third situation students are working on a short story assignment, preparing the story they have chosen for a class presentation. The teacher has given a set of expectations for the assignment and the students have planned accordingly. The first group of students begins their presentation and it is immediately clear that their work is not very well organized or prepared. The presenting students speak quickly in quiet voices that are hard to hear. The focus of the lesson is not apparent, the posters have not been displayed ahead of time. After about ten minutes, the teacher stops the group and tells them that she is getting annoyed. She takes the opportunity to again tell the class what her expectations are for the presentations,

and as she is talking attempts to make the assignment more clear to the students. She is becoming aware that what she assumed to be clear instructions were not as clearly understood by the students.

The students learned a great deal from this short story presentation assignment. They learned about the elements of story itself, about aspects specific and unique to their particular story. They learned how to work collaboratively and how to present information to a group. They also learned how important the teacher's understanding of an effective presentation was, and that they had to conform to those expectations. They learned what elements of presentation are valued by the teacher and how to include them into a presentation.

In yet another class, the students have handed in their dialogue journals for bi-weekly assessments. These student dialogue journals focus on ideas shaped through the students' literature reading and are exchanged regularly with the teacher and with peers. The students have daily time in class to read and respond in their journals. The teacher has read each of the students' work, despairing of a few students who after seven months still write skimpy plot summaries or nothing at all, but delighted with other students who have engaged with their reading, questioning and making connections. The teacher prepared to return their journals to them, along with a written appraisal of their work. The journals are piled on the teacher's desk, and the question being asked by the students was, "What did I get? Can I see what I got?"

Although teachers struggle to become untangled from the web of "What did I get?" "What did you give me?", to make the students' work of primary importance and the assessment secondary, the students still rely on the teacher for a judgment. "What did I get?" is the first, the only question they ask as they read through their journals, although there is evidence in later responses of their acknowledgement of the teacher's comments. They have been able to engage with their reading in many personal ways, but as yet have not been able to see their response as more important than the teacher's assessment. The teacher has encouraged the students to value their own ideas and the

process of writing to better understand their text, but as yet has not been able to relinquish her role as judge. She holds on to that role with her teacher appraisal.

Confusion and Contradiction

Why is it that the learning gained by students is so confused and confusing? Why can teachers not clarify their intents and ensure that students are learning what is intended? In the examples given above, often the teachers were not aware of the mixed messages the students were receiving in the classes. They were not able to understand the reasons for the students' confusion. How can teachers become more aware of the learning going on in their classes, of the messages being received? How can we open up ourselves to uncover the assumptions we bring to our teaching, in light of the fact that our "selves" are covered to protect them in their fragile and delicate states. There are so many events occurring in a classroom at any given moment, in any given day. We cannot know them all, we cannot respond to them all, we cannot remember them all. "The practical pedagogy of the classroom does not readily reduce itself to neat theoretical categories or to unqualitifed generalizations. Not only is it common to find apparently contradictory practices co-existing within the same school; it is not unusual to find them co-existing within the same classroom, and with the practice of a single teacher (Piper in Gilbert, 1989).

The job of "teacher" is highly complex and fraught with fundamental contradictions. As we know, teaching encompasses many different roles, and these roles are highly contradictory in nature. "Complexity [exists] because a dialectic is there. Nothing about society or language or culture or the human soul is simple; wherever there are human beings, there is activity; and human acts are processes, and processes are dialectical" (Berthoff, 1987, p. xii). It is a public expectation that teachers are knowledgeable in one or many subject areas, that they are kind and sensitive, that they are efficient

managers, that they act as mentor and guide to their students, that they can be objective and effective assessors of students' work.

Not only are these roles very different from each other in nature but they often clash, leaving the teacher in messy and difficult predicaments. These predicaments make the teacher appear to be unskilled and unsure, unable to live in only one role at a time but uncomfortable in the multiple roles with which he/she must cope. Teachers are faced with the dilemma of assuming multiple roles simultaneously, roles that cause chaos and confusion for the teacher and the students. As in the situations cited above, the students are receiving mixed messages from the teacher, who is in turn responding to mixed messages from various internal and external sources.

Teachers as Readers

Purves (in Gilbert, 1989) suggests that teachers have multiple roles even in the (singular) act of reading student texts. Four roles for teachers as readers of student texts are identified: 1) the common reader, to read for personal and private satisfaction; 2) the judge, to read to pronounce upon the text's quality; 3) the literary critic, to read and analyze the text's literary merit; and 4) the diagnostician, to read a text in search of symptoms of a writer's personal problems. More often than not we do not distinguish between our many roles and attempt to read for everything at once. Our own confusion of purpose may lead us to write confusing and contradictory messages on our students' texts. We attempt to correct, to encourage, to guide, and to model all at the same time. "We have failed to understand the teacher's role in the construction of meaning. We need to develop a theory of reading student texts which takes into account our reading of the students themselves, of our own unconscious motivations and associations, and finally, of the interactive and dialectical nature of the student-teacher relationship" (Tobin, 1991, p. 335).

"What are the limits of knowledge/power/subjectivity relations?" asks McLaren (1988, p. xiii). "How do we develop a public discourse that integrates the language of power and purpose with the language of intimacy, friendship and caring?" Is it, in fact, possible for teachers to assimilate these various roles and relations? How do we determine what our students desire and require of us? How do we determine what is possible to give?

Reasons to Evaluate

As we are caught in the sticky web of teacher roles, "webs of tension that surround the English teacher" (Boomer, 1982, p. 136), we are charged with the development and growth of our students. We are caregivers, mentors, and friends to our students, roles we do not take for granted or dismiss lightly. We view teaching with responsibility and concern. We want to help our students as best we can. We want our students to become the best they can be. What, then, is the best they can be?

What is it that we actually want of our students? We want all of our students to be responsible, thoughtful, articulate, polite, friendly, organized, witty, caring, interesting, unique. We want our students to challenge the system (but not us), to take risks (within acceptable societal bounds), to be collaborative (but stand out as unique), We want our students to have values and ideas and standards (just like ours). We must begin to articulate what it is we are striving to attain with our students, and the ways that our goals might be attained. As Giroux (1988) suggests, we often ignore important questions. What are our goals and purposes in assessing students' writing? Chater (1984) suggests the following reasons to evaluate students' writing:

1) to develop and expand work within the limits of the individual child's ability;

2) to provide feedback to the pupil, to let him[her] know how well his/her work is going;

3) to identify strengths and weaknesses in the various aspects of English so that the teacher can plan and guide the pupil in future work;

4) to inform parents about their child's progress;

5) to inform ... heads of school about pupils' performance and attitude;

6) to select pupils for courses in the next years;

7) to inform employers and further and higher education institutions about the progress, achievements and attitudes of the pupils;

8) to get to 'know' the pupil; and

9) to get the pupil to assess him/herself. (p. 6-7)

The goals identified by Chater, representative of much of the rhetoric giving reasons for evaluation, focus on the reporting aspect of evaluation rather than on the development aspect. England (1979), however, focuses on helping the student as he identifies objectives for writing:

1) to give students a reason for wanting to write again (we must remember that our comments do influence students' attitudes about future writing in our class);

2) to help students perceive the process of composing;

3) to ask students questions about the choices they have made;

4) to directly point out one or two grammatical, mechanical, or syntactical problems;

5) to always make one suggestion about larger rhetorical strategies; and

6) to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning. (p. 97)

England's goals focus more on giving helpful guidance to the student rather than to others. As we are articulating our ideas about our "model" students, we must also find ways to negotiate our goals for our students with our students.

We are teachers and professionals; and, like our students, we are also person(ality)s. We come to the classroom with our own values and beliefs, often not clearly articulated but deeply ingrained. We find it easier and more comfortable to work with some students than with others. We enjoy reading the work of some students more than that of others. We may like some students better than others.

The bell rings and students wander into class. They are greeted by the teacher with personal friendly comments and questions. When Theresa enters, there is a terse "Take your seat" from the teacher. The teacher's manner changes perceptibly, and immediately the reason is clear. Theresa proceeds to (loudly) insult other students, and to pronounce that she has not brought her books. Theresa's arrival has created a disturbance for the teacher and for other students. She creates more work for the teacher and causes her to expend a great deal of energy that could otherwise be spent on the rest of the students.

How, then, do we put aside our personal "selves" in order to develop positive relationships with our students, avoid giving them mixed messages about our expectations and values? How do we develop a trusting environment for ourselves and the students alike? Elbow (1993) suggests that good writing teachers like writing -- and like students. "Good teachers see what is only potentially good, they get a kick out of mere possibility -- and they encourage it" (p. 199).

Elbow suggests several approaches that enable him to like his students' writing: first, to have the students do lots of private writing and merely shared writing (writing the teacher does not read at all, and writing the teacher does not comment on); second, to have students

sharing lots of writing with each other, and after a while responding to each other (it helps build community); then, teachers should practice looking for what is good, or potentially good, in their students' writing and praise it. Teachers should try to get to know students a bit as people (have conferences or conversations with them each term). They should let some of themselves show and work on their own writing and work on learning to like their own work as well as their students' work.

As Elbow's comments suggest, all forms of assessment affect our feelings and perceived self -- our affective as well as our cognitive "selves". Students' self-concepts are also shaped by the type of feedback they get and the manner in which it is communicated. Whereas a student journal is an invaluable source of information regarding how a student really thinks, grading it or writing detached and insensitive comments can be quite destructive. The more we risk personally, the more destructive simplistic evaluation will be (Caine and Caine, 1994). Teachers must come to realize the influence they have over their students and take responsibility for this power.

Students spent many hours on a report assigned by the teacher. They worked in the library collecting information and making notes; they worked at home writing and editing their work. They created title pages and tables of contents. Their work was handed in and then returned a week later with a few comments and a grade out of fifty. The grade said everything -- how highly the teacher valued their work. Their only understanding of their success came through the grade. The comments supported the teacher's reasons for giving the grade, reasons they accepted. But the comments did not suggest how the teacher liked their work, did not point out the successful aspects of the work. For all of their hours of work, they received several seconds worth of response.

The types of assignments that are given, the comments -- both verbal and written -- have a great impact on the students' image of themselves and the work they will produce in the future. "The kind of judgments made by teachers on the quality of children's writing is one of the most important elements of [their] education" (Gannon, 1985, p. 8). How, then, do we give students "clear" and meaningful messages

about our views regarding the quality of their work? How do we enable the students to appreciate their own work?

Teachers are human, and have human limitations. We are not omniscient, and although we attempt to understand our students from a variety of perspectives, our own is the dominant perspective. Teachers' thoughts about evaluation depends on their (largely unarticulated) values and beliefs in a general sense. Thiessen and Moorhead (1992) have suggested that some teachers have "interactive" approaches to their classes and use the experiences and progress of the students as the basis for evaluation (accountability from inside) whereas some teachers have "responsive" approaches and apply age, grade, or program norms as the basis for evaluation (accountability to outside). Teachers' personal philosophies strongly influence their grading practices. How can we best come to understand our own beliefs and values in order to know how they influence our teacher "selves"? How can we avoid confused and messy evaluative comments on our students' writing?

Teachers and Students Communicating

In order to develop open and communicating relationships with students, teachers must find ways to share ideas and understandings. Written comments are one way, but they can be misread and misinterpreted. There is no immediate way of checking the reader's understanding of a written comment. "Student writers usually are responding to our comments, but sometimes not in the way we think" (Spandel and Stiggins, 1990, p. 84). One student attempted to respond to a teacher's comment of "You have not described the situation in detail" in the following way: "I put in lots of quotes and my answers are all long." Another student responded to the comment "Take more time with your work" in the following way: "It took me a lot of time reading it over and over again to get the meaning of the poem, but I still didn't do very well."

A conversation, as opposed to written comments, allows for a two-way exchange of information where understanding can be immediately and regularly checked. There are, however, limitations to conversations. Although often a preferred model of teaching, we have difficulty structuring the classroom so that we can devote a sufficient amount of time to conversation or conferences (Freedman, 1987). Conversations are time- and energy-consuming, especially in a setting of twenty-five students. One teacher commented, "I know conferences are good, but they take up most of my lunch hours." Teachers expend a great deal of time on evaluation of students' written work, and there is only so much time to allot. We make choices about how we spend time, but often written assignments call us with more urgent voices than do the students themselves. "So while enormous quantities of writing are produced by pupils, demanding thousands of pupil hours, and while most of it is read and marked by teachers, there is a constant dissatisfaction with both the quality of much that is produced and with the efficacy of many of the marking procedures used" (Gannon, 1985, p. 8). Thus teachers continue to feel guilty at not satisfying their professional desires (they do not use their time to their or their students' best advantage), their personal desires (they continue to devote many hours to evaluating written work), or the desires of the students (they do not give the type and quality of feedback desired).

There is a further, less obvious concern with conversation that needs to be considered. It has previously been suggested that conversation, or "conferencing" as we have come to label it, takes time. It also takes energy, as negotiation is occurring throughout. Conversation, if it is to be meaningful and honest, also requires trust between the teacher and the student. The power relationship (who gives the mark?) that exists between "teacher" and "student" needs to be acknowledged and addressed. Students often feel that there is no point in discussing their work or their grades; the teachers have early on determined their ability and their value. "They often give you the same mark, or an average mark, no matter how good or bad your assignments are done" (Gilbert, 1989, p. 47). One teacher's attempt to initiate conversation rather than writing a negative comment takes the

form of a brief written comment, "Please see me." This comment, however, can serve as a red flag to the student and interpreted as "I have done something wrong again." If indeed we value communication with our students about their work, we need to find ways to allow for honest communication without students feeling vulnerable or disadvantaged for having spoken.

Managing Evaluation

Given the limitations with which teachers are faced, how is the evaluation of student writing best managed? Anthony et al. (1991) suggest that evaluation needs to be "numerous and multifaceted, leading to profiles of growth and achievement over time; qualitative as well as quantitative; reflective of the 'constructive' nature of language; collaborative; and noncompetitive" (p. 3). Teachers are left on their own to determine how these various evaluation strategies will be implemented in their classrooms, to balance the needs and expectations of two hundred students with the demands of the "system", parents, and administration, and still have the wherewithall to consider their own expectations and desires.

The concept of "conferencing", while recognized by many teachers as desirable practice, has also caused us a great deal of consternation. One teacher discussed her attempts to implement student conferences into her evaluation scheme with high school students. The process had many merits but was not without its drawbacks. The strengths of reduced time spent on "marking" assignments and the opportunities to interact and negotiate with students were countered by the amount of time required to hold even a brief conference with each of the students, and with the expectations of students and parents to "mark" every assignment.

In addition, there is considerable stress caused by attempting to discuss an issue of vital importance to the students, an issue that they cannot (and we cannot) see "clearly" or objectively, that is, the

value of their work, of their "selves." Our vision is additionally clouded by our attempts to address many roles at once, to be a "common reader", a judge, and a diagnostician all at once.

Teachers are well aware of the variety of evaluative possibilities available to them. They have heard of diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluation approaches. They have heard of checklists, anecdotal comments, holistic marking, analytical and primary trait scoring, rubrics, and conferences. However, teachers often rely on their own experiences and beliefs when they are selecting evaluative approaches, approaches that do not cause them discomfort.

When we seek alternative approaches we can feel caught in unresolvable dilemmas. One of the teachers talks about her feeling of being caught between her sense of accountability to the system and her desire to help her students. "I feel like I'm being slack because I haven't written a formal mark and corrected all the grammar -- you know, it's all the stuff we've been socialized to believe, yet I know that a read-around, having the students read eight or more essays written by their peers, is much better. I'm learning that there are lots of ways of marking." Teachers most often rely on their experience and instincts when evaluating students' writing. "By far the commonest method of assessing pupils' writing is by 'impression marking'" (Anthony et al., p. 61) and this is born out in my own research with classroom teachers. Teachers often give brief comments and an overall percentage grade, or a percentage grade that has been broken down into categories.

We are drawn to assessment practices that include conversations with our students, even though these approaches are difficult in so many ways. It seems to be more difficult to find intellectal engagement with students' texts than it is with the students themselves. We tend to return to our role as judge, identifying "errors" in writing and in thinking, rather than maintaining a role of interested reader. We seek meaningful engagement with the students and their ideas, but are forever caught in the demands of other roles.

Teachers believe that students deserve to receive "feedback" on their work, feedback that includes comments to help them improve their work. One teacher comments, "I try to give students feedback as to how they've done on an assignment and what they've done. I tell them how they might do [the assignment] better -- from my perspective -- and hopefully how I can help them to enhance what they've done." Teachers also realize that their feedback is shaped to support a grade, rather than the grade supporting the feedback. "Grading often forces us to write comments to justify our grades. These are often not the comments we would make if we were just trying to help the student write better (Elbow, 1993). Caught in the dilemmas of time, ranking, and justifying a grade, teachers' comments are often reduced to:

- good ideas
- The reader is not sure what you are writing about
- Your ideas are clearer in this paper. Now, keep working on your sentences
- A pleasure to read
- Specifics required
- Insufficient data
- Excellent but too long

As reported by Searle and Dillon (1980), "specific reference to content was a rare feature of teacher response" (p. 773). Comments such as the ones above, referring to mechanical errors, structural concerns, and general comments ("good work" and "interesting") accounted for 86% of all responses made by the teachers in their study (134 samples).

Again we are faced with the dilemma of living diverse roles at the same time. We wish to be a guide or writing friend, and we continually find ourselves in the role of assessor or judge. The tensions here between writing pedagogy which focuses on personal exploration and

learning, and pedagogy which focuses on audience and readability are apparent (Gilbert, 1989). We are continually encouraging students to express their ideas, use "voice" in their writing, and yet we also (often at the same time) remind them of surface features of their writing that need to be correct.

There's a Student Attached to that Work

As teachers of writing, we attempt to separate the writing from the student who has written the writing, in order to be "objective" as assessors. We as teachers believe that we should focus on the work of the student, the processes and products, rather than on the student her/himself. Yet we know that it is impossible to look at a student's work without the face of the student coming to mind. We can see the beseeching brown eyes, the defiant stance, the playful smile. These human associations become part of the writing we are evaluating and shape the response we give to the writing.

A student came to discuss his low mark with the teacher. "Essentially," the teacher commented, "his work was just 'flat'. However, his mark was quite low compared to the other students, and he had worked hard, and he was really a 'good' student, so I decided to raise his mark."

Our personal impressions can help us to be more forgiving of "gaps" and "errors" in the writing or can encourage us to look with a more critical eye at particular aspects of the writing. Our personal feelings can help us build or break down the self-esteem of our students. And often we are unaware of our 'tinted' readings of the writing itself. Teachers are expected to articulate the "actual practices they use to generate grades: the student characteristics they use, their rules of evidence, or the standards they apply" (Stiggins et al in Kushniruk, 1994). As some of our intuitive feelings and humane decisions are difficult to articulate in an acceptable rational language, we are often driven to creating a set of "actual practices" that fits with

the expectations of higher administrations. As we come to articulate our "actual practices", they become part of the set of beliefs and values that we truly hold for ourselves. C.S. Lewis comments, "People are obviously far more anxious to express their approval and disapproval of things than to describe them" (in Christenbury, 1994, p. 7). Perhaps it is not that people are more anxious but more able to judge than to describe their views. We are caught in our inability to clearly articulate our feelings and beliefs.

Other values and beliefs that influence how we understand students' writing are not clearly recognized, causing us to give continuous confusing and contradictory message to our students. For example, a teacher asked the students for first draft writing of an assignment, but also ask for it to be well-written and carefully proofread. This request contradicted what she had previously told her students about first draft writing and her own beliefs. We ask students for "personal" responses, but ask directed and structuring questions that must be answered in the response. We express our belief in the value of holding student/teacher conferences, and then do not respond to the comments of the students. We believe that students need to "work" for their marks in order to "deserve" them. We look at lengthy pieces of writing, especially work that is neatly presented and shows superficial correctness, with a more favourable eye. We continually give our students mixed messages through our instructions, our verbal and written comments, and final grades. We cause our students to be continually asking "What do you want?" when we are trying to prepare them to become independent life-long learners.

The dismay students display about writing is the result of teachers unconsciously offering contradictory advice about composing -- guidance grounded in assumptions that simply do not square with each other (Berlin in Gilbert, 1989). Gebhardt (in Gilbert, 1989) suggests that "the presence of contradictory, partial formulations of theory lets teachers choose descriptions of the writing process that fit their personal experiences and biases, and teach them to students as if they were the truth about writing" (p. 38). Writing is described as

individual meaning-making on one hand, and on the other there is an increasing array of textbooks willing to offer 'good' pedagogy to teachers. Teachers must attempt to sort out these confusions for themselves.

Teachers have been accused of "'mindlessness' in their failure to let philosophy shape pedagogy" (Fulkerson in Gilbert, 1989, p. 38). However, teachers are often unable to recognize what is actually happening in their classrooms, let alone know which philosophies are shaping their pedagogy. The intentions we verbalize for our classroom practice are often not born out by outside observation. Teachers' descriptions of the aims of writing fall clearly within popular paradigms, but "accounts of teacher practice (by a research team as well as students in the school) was somewhat at odds with these descriptions" (Piper in Gilbert, 1989, p. 38). Teachers are well aware of the most recent of popular trends and terminology (journalling, portfolio assessment, self-assessment, conferencing) and yet are unaware of fundamental shifts in the understanding of pedagogy that are suggested by these new trends.

We have difficulties in recognizing much of what goes on in our classrooms. One teacher commented to her students as she handed back their journals, "On the whole they were fantastic. I've written lots of comments, so be sure to read all of the comments. I've written specific things to you." The comments themselves, however, consisted of remarks such as "good insights", "good point", "denial?" and "yes", as well as many check marks on the page. The teacher's perception was that there were extensive comments. The reality as experienced by the students was different.

Another teacher talked about encouraging her students to become independent learners able to express their opinions articulately. Her classroom was a place of discussion, but a large amount of the discussion was conducted by the teacher herself. Her desire for discussion was sometimes overpowered by her desire for the students to gain all of her own knowledge. Another teacher commented,

"Sometimes the message I thought I was sending or intending to send and the actual message I sent were not the same thing."

I received invitations into two other classrooms, and was told by both teachers that I was welcome, but "not much was going on" in the class. And yet, upon arriving, I was able to see a great deal of learning occurring. Often the students use the same phrase to describe their classrooms; they, too, cannot see all of what is transpiring in a classroom. They remember only certain features of their learning. They often complain about having to write essays, and they see essays as the major form of writing in high school. However, teachers perceive that essay-writing constitutes only a small portion of the written tasks given.

Teachers are far from mindless in their classrooms. The complexity of teaching is overwhelming. Teachers genuinely care about the students and are continually looking for ways to help them succeed. All of the teachers I have worked with in my research spend many hours considering how they can better help their students to be independent learners and human beings. They continually attempt to give their students skills and understandings that help to prepare them for life. Teachers use activities involving literature, writing, speaking and listening in their continuous struggle to make sense of the curriculum for and with their students.

However, as Smith (1982) states, "schools are not good places in which to learn to write and to read" (p. 40), and he points to the "limitations of schools as centres of learning: their institutionalisation and resultant inertia; their preoccupation with testing; their age-grading organization... reading and writing are 'trivialized' within schools." Much as teachers attempt to create "real" writing situations in classrooms, they are constrained by "examinations, school administrations, students' laziness, or lack of ability" (Gilbert, 1989, p. 40). Their feelings of powerlessness as they are caught between many conflicting agendas cause them to blame whatever factors they can find. This sense of powerlessness also creates fear -- of lacking knowledge, of looking disorganized, of looking inept -- and interferes

with their desires -- to help all of their students, to feel successful, to feel liked.

Words, Words, Words

The confusing and conflicting messages given to and by teachers about evaluation become jumbled as we try to pin down the meanings of terms and descriptors. We become enmeshed in words: "norm", "criterion", "standardized". We try to give "formative", "summative" and diagnostic" feedback to our students as we evaluate/assess/grade their work. We attempt to assimilate words into our vocabularies that do not support educational directions at all: "score", "assess", "rate". We use any number of words that give any number of meanings:

appraise

value

esteem

assess

price

find

review

consider

estimate

mark

score

adjudicate

arbitrate

judge

decide

evaluate

rate

grade

rank

decree

deem

conclude

criticize

sentence

condemn

These words have largely been appropriated from industry, from sport, from law, from mathematics, business, and science. How can we determine what it is that we want to do with our students, what is best for our students, what will enable us to educate our students? Perhaps we must examine the words we choose to define our relationships and our roles, considering the hidden meanings behind the words we use.

We strive to find ways to communicate meaningfully with our students, to establish relationships that will nurture their growth and learning. We want to give them opportunities to do "real" writing, writing in which the students can explore authentic voice and expression. But in the very "giving" of opportunities, are we assuming a power relationship that negates the realness of the writing? Are we forgetting the realness of the students that own the writing? Students and teachers are caught in a system where the evaluation, the "grade", is the ultimate goal. One student commented, "You want to make it sound good to get a good grade, but you don't really mean it" (Gilbert, p. 47). Students fiercely protect their real selves in a system that is often not very sympathetic or forgiving. They cannot risk showing their true

selves to teachers -- perhaps even to themselves. Instead, they shelter themselves with words and ideas that they don't really mean.

Assessment (in most traditional writing models, process-oriented or not) tends to be teacher-directed. It is the teacher who is entrusted with the job of making judgments about the quality of the writing produced. However, assessment tends to be associated with grades, and this weakens the potential of assessment for helping students improve their writing (Spandel and Stiggins, 1990). The "realness" of a writing situation for students changes dramatically when the student's future (in a grade) is at stake. The risks are high, and few are willing to gamble with a relationship that is tenuous and unclear. Although students believe in their teachers' desire to help and their knowledge and ability to do so, their trust is limited to classroom experiences.

Gaps

Teachers have considerable influence on their students, perhaps in ways we do not recognize. The conversations we have with students, the conferences we hold, the written exchange of ideas we share, often serve to shelter and protect our true 'selves'. There are many gaps between what is said, what is thought, and what is understood. Each person fills in the gaps differently, or does not fill them in at all. Teachers attempt to fill in the gaps by elaborating on instructions, by giving suggestions as the work progresses, by writing or verbalizing comments when the work is completed. Students attempt to fill in the gaps by asking questions, "What do you want?" "Is this what you want?" "How long should it be?" As teachers attempt to leave gaps open for students to fill in their own ways, the students' cries become more desperate, "Is this right?" "Tell us what you want!"

Another gap that exists and does not seem to be narrowing is the chasm-like gap that exists between the research of teaching practices and teaching itself. Murray (1982) laments that "one of the greatest impediments to effective writing is the way writing has been taught by English teachers" (p. 167). Language classrooms (Gilbert, 1989) have become notorious as places where current research knowledge fails to inform, to alter, or to improve classroom practice. Why is it that classroom teachers are reluctant to engage with or apply theoretical concepts? Why are they reluctant to take the advice of writing-researchers? Teachers themselves recognize that traditional approaches to teaching reading and writing are not working, and yet they continue to use the same approaches.

What We Want to Do/What We Have to Do

One of the reasons for teachers' reluctance to let go of traditional English teaching methods is exemplified in the classrooms of the teachers with whom I worked. It is a regular topic of conversation and looms over the heads of all high school teachers -- the final exam, the assessment developed and mandated by the provincial Department of Education. This final exam has created beliefs and structures that have become adopted by students and teachers alike. There is a commonly held belief that the final exams focus the students, give them the motivation to attend classes and to pay attention, even to value the material being presented. There is a belief that teachers (in general) need to be "standardized", need to be told what makes good learning and what does not. There is an implicit understanding that these tests are more important than all of the year's work, because a three hour test, or a five and a half hour test in two sittings, is valued as highly as the entire year's work.

And although teachers scoff at "teaching to the test" there is a perceived need to "prepare" students for the exam; if not teaching to the test, then teaching how to write the test, learning the rules of the game. Many teachers show the students what the test looks like, talk

about the strategies to use in writing the test and what to study. Teachers talk about their responsibility to give their students the best possible chance to succeed in order to prepare them for their futures. Teachers do not talk about their need to have students do well for their own satisfaction and future successes. They do not talk about learning the rules of the game for themselves, so that their students do well in order to give the teachers a good reputation. They do not talk about the political agendas in which we are all caught.

Caught in the Politics

One political agenda attempts to create a sense of structure and organization of education, to prove to society that public education knows what it is doing and is indeed accomplishing its goals. The political agenda is to hide or ignore the messiness of learning, the unpredictability of students and of teachers. The political agenda attempts to quantify its goals, to hold students and teachers "accountable" for their teaching and learning in clear and measurable ways. Another agenda is to be as cost-efficient as possible with educational matters, hence reducing the number of teachers and increasing the numbers of students, reducing the amount of time teachers have to plan and collaborate and increasing the number of tasks each teacher must perform.

As teachers we respond to these demands in diverse ways. Whether we agree with the premises of these imposed agendas or not, we often feel pressured to conform to the system, to help our students succeed on the final exams. We do not feel confident to ignore the external "suggestions" regarding exam preparation -- there is so much at stake. As caring and humane teachers we too measure our success by the success of our students, albeit in different ways. We want to see our students leave school with diverse opportunities ahead of them, opportunities that are often available to students with high exam marks.

In our concern to help students succeed, we become caught in bounded spaces, in words that confine and constrict our understandings. We can become caught up in a belief that students do not have valid or valuable experiences that can inform their understanding. We become so immersed in the world of exams that we can forget the purposes of education, we can forget the learning outside and beyond schooling. We tend to focus entirely on the "material" that needs to be "covered" in order to succeed on the exam rather than looking beyond. We forget to involve our students in their learning in our enthusiasm to "help" them to master the course. We all become involved in an agenda that is not ours, that we cannot control, a nameless, faceless agenda of societal magnitude.

Evaluation as a political tool colours and shapes our practices as teachers. It influences our choice of literature, our methods of discussion, our writing assignments, our ability to hear our students' diverse voices. External evaluative tools (exams, surveys) can make teaching seem simple, can give us a clear focus. They support the values of standardization and accountability. They can also clash with our intuitive understandings of students and learning, creating confusion and messiness.

Questions and conflicting messages about evaluation plague us -- or they can help to continue keeping teaching alive for us as learners and as teachers. Political activity exists in the classroom as well as in the educational system as a whole. We as students and teachers continually search for "position" and legitimacy as we attempt to assert our own agenda. Each person in the classroom has a wealth of personal experience and background (culture, gender, class, age) that is too often subsumed and ignored, buried under the weight of the system's imposed curriculum. How can each agenda be recognized as legitimate and valuable in a system where there are multiple voices, multiple powers? How can students be asked to expose themselves in their ignorance and naivite, to be honest in their writing, to trust those in authority? These are important questions when we attempt to position individual meaning-making within a larger political structure.

Caught by Fear

External evaluation that affords us no control and no voice keeps us caught in fear -- of failure, of ridicule, of lacking the answers. One teacher asks, "How do you know, when you get an assignment handed in, whether you did a lousy job of teaching the material or if the student wasn't paying attention, or just did a lousy job of the assignment? If I give an assignment, how do I know I'm measuring those things realistically... it's kind of guesswork." If we give thought to our evaluation processes, we are always uncertain. We cannot be sure that our evaluations have been "correct" or that we have helped our students to learn the intended objectives. We fear that we give marks too generously; we fear giving marks that are too low. How are we affecting the students? How are others judging our own performances through the students' marks? We find safety and comfort in the "mean", inclined to stay within a standard "average."

When I am marking external exams, and I come across an essay that has been very well written, I first assign a high grade. I then look again and wonder if other markers will agree with me. Perhaps it is just an over-enthusiastic first impression, perhaps it is not that good at all. If I give a high grade and others do not agree with me, I will be asked to justify my evaluation. I, too, am being evaluated. I do not want to appear incompetent, or renegade. I had better stick with a more average mark, so that my mark will not appear too discrepant.

Even though there are several people marking one paper, we are not clear on the thought processes of the markers. What external factors influence the reactions of the markers themselves, regardless of the clarity of criteria? Is there any way to determine the influences upon the marker, the influences upon the student?

We tell students that we value "real" writing; we encourage students to develop "authentic voice" in their writing:

In your journal, feel free to express your opinions and concerns, ask questions and explore different styles.

How is "real" writing to be determined? How is "voice" evaluated? How do we interpret "authentic" when its meaning holds ideas of the truth, the authority, and offers a certainty to the words being written? What is being expected of the students, real-ly?

I have recognized how pleased I feel when I read good ideas in students' writing, when I see expression that is unique and clear. I have valued students' writing by giving positive assessments, good marks. I have also recognized how annoyed I feel when I read student work that questions my own ideas, criticizes and devalues what I believe. I have attributed this type of writing to lack of understanding and maturity. I have then reconsidered all of my evaluations. What I have valued is a type of mirror image of myself. When students' voices blend with my own, they are clear and intelligible and valuable. When students' voices present dissonance, they are misguided, uninformed, not capable.

I realize that students are as capable of playing this "game" as they are of playing any other game we structure for them. How, then, do we change the rules of the game? Is it possible for all players to be learners and winners?

Students expend a great deal of energy and time searching for answers to the question, "What does s/he want?" The answers are elusive and continually modulating. "We have to put in lots of effort." "It needs to look polished, not sloppy." "The assignment should be creative, stand out from everybody else's." "I need to keep on topic, and support what I say." "I need to use how [the teacher] has taught us to write -- in correct order, paragraphs and stuff." "The teacher expects it to be at least half a page, I need to use quotes where possible, have two drafts of the answer, I don't know, just answer to the best of my ability."

Students believe that it is possible to discover the answer to the question "What does the teacher want?" and when they give that to the

teacher they will be successful. They put their faith into this system. However, teachers do not necessarily know what it is we want until after the students have made their attempts. Teachers are fearful and suspicious of perfection -- there must always be something that can be improved. We are conditioned to read in order to find improvements rather than to enjoy what we read. So although we strive for perfection for our students and desire success for all of our students, we are caught in our fear of the actual attainment of "perfection."

We are caught between other fears and desires as well, often the same ones as our students. We fear humiliation, feeling ignorant and unsuccessful. We desire recognition and success. We fear rejection and we desire acceptance. We desire control, for ourselves and of our surroundings, and we fear the loss of control. We want to please, to be liked, to feel smart and to be recognized as important. We fear messy situations and failure.

I think back to the many conversations I have had with teachers, conversations about teaching practice and about evaluation. I cannot recall them telling me a single story about out-and-out personal failure, but I shudder when I think of my own. Failure is painful, and automatically we try to avoid pain, but it continues to exist in the depth of our memories. I recall, nearly twenty years ago now, my first evaluation as a teacher. I failed. I was told it was for my own good, that this (devastating) recommendation would help me get a permanent job the following year. I was told that it was not a reflection of me, but of the circumstances. I was devastated. I told no one (to this day I have told no one) and I avoided my colleagues for weeks afterwards. I still feel the burn of humiliation as I recall the incident.

Our writing represents our "selves"; evaluation of our writing/selves suggests lack, error, faulty judgment. We fear what we perceive as attack, as we cannot defend ourselves. When we express our ideas, we present ourselves in vulnerable ways. Evaluation points out our weaknesses and our failures or (sometimes more devastatingly) ignores our ideas altogether in focusing on the surface appearance of our work. A teacher comments, "the word exam means [the students]

are going to be evaluated, and that strikes fear in their hearts." Teachers often react in the same way when they are faced with an evaluation. When we are fearful we judge much more, as a defence. When we feel safe and able to trust, we can "evaluate" in less judgmental, more positive ways. How can we reduce our sense of fear in evaluative processes, as teachers and as learners? Returning to Elbow's question posed earlier, how can we come to like our students' work, our own work, as we learn from each other?

We are often caught attempting to protect our students' "feelings" and encouraging their risk-taking and future development, as well as offering an "objective" and "fair" evaluation.

"Trust me," I entreat my students. "These are my expectations, don't worry about the grade. These are the things you need to do to be successful." Tammy spends hours developing a model of a space ship that was featured in her novel, but her attempt has not been very successfull. She looks to me with large eyes, "Have I done well?" she wants to know. I need to encourage her in her efforts, although I know that other projects are more accurate, more polished, more complete.

Perhaps, as some teachers do, we should give assignments in which <u>all</u> students can be successful. Perhaps we need to send them back to the drawing board until they achieve a successful product, as other teachers are apt to do. Our challenge as teachers is to create environments where there is an atmosphere of low threat and high challenge for all students and teachers alike, where students are not fearful of evaluation but welcome it as a learning experience.

6

c l a r i t y

chiaroscuro

clear
unclouded
without a
doubt

focused
sharply outlined
images

a splotch of bright yellow colour
in the greenness of the grass catches my eye
a dandelion, I imagine myself saying as I gently
pluck it from its long thin stem
examine its multitude of tiny yellow petals
perfectly forming around a central core
not quite fully bloomed

I spy another dandelion, and another, all vibrantly
unique -- more fullness, more roundness, more delicacy
yet all distinctly yolky as only dandelions can be
I clearly know dandelions

"Look, mummy, a dandelion!" and she rushes at me with
a fluffy ball of grey fuzz
"Watch me blow it away."

A clear day, clear as a bell, is that clear? I see sparkling undimmed, I hear chiming undulled, I understand unobstructed. The images in my head are detailed and sharply delineated, and even though there are thousands of images that I can associate with "clear day", its meaning is distinct to me. I know the signified that corresponds to this signifier. It is clear to me. I have assumed an understanding of "clear day" that I hold in my memory. It is only when I use my signifier "clear day" to communicate that meaning to someone else that this clarity diminishes. Then all of my personal associations of "clear day" become entangled in another's personal associations of the same signifier and my meaning becomes obscured, waiting for negotiation to regain its clarity.

It is when we do not recognize a need for negotiation of meaning that clarity is muffled and dimmed. Lacan suggests that "rather than supposing a transparency between signifier and signified, an easy access from word to meaning, there is a real barrier or resistance" (Leader and Groves, 1995, p. 39). "Words generate meanings which are beyond the understanding of those who use them. There is a difference between what you mean to say and what your words say. That's why everyday life involves a succession of misunderstandings and apologies," (p. 40) and "I didn't mean it!" statements.

> Language is ... the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity, and discourse provokes the emergence of subjectivity because it consists of discrete instances. In some way language puts forth "empty" forms which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriates to himself and which he relates to his "person," at the same time defining himself as I and a partner as you. The instance of discourse is thus constitutive of all the coordinates that define the subject. (Benveniste in Silverman, 1983, p. 45)

<u>Using Language to Negotiate Meaning</u>

Language is an attempt to capture symbolically what is in our imaginations, to bridge the chasm between the thoughts of myself and the thoughts of an other. Language is a continual negotiation of meaning, and in our ongoing search for "clarity" there must be a reciprocity of words between two people, an understanding that meaning is created "inbetween" the words. I can present my thoughts a thousand times, but if there is no receiver of my thoughts, they glide off into the void. I can assume a clarity of language and as long as my assumptions are not challenged or questioned the appearance of clarity can exist. However, when my unarticulated assumptions are examined, the assumption of clarity must also be examined.

As Dewey suggests, "the primary motive for language is to influence (through the expression of desire, emotion, and thought) the activity of others" (1910, p. 79). Without reception, language is empty and meaning-less. "Language and thought itself are both fundamentally dialogic in their nature, and are acquired through conversational interaction" (Staton, 1987, p. 57). A response involves an implicit commitment of self, an engagement with the other. Reflexivity of language and thought is possible when the "other" exists, either as another person or as an aspect of self. The existence of both self and other enable the possibility of conversations that grow and develop, changing both self and other in the process. We need "feedback" in order for our language to hold ongoing meaning. When we create a thought, we want to share it, and we can do that through spoken or written words, through gesture or symbol. In order for our ideas to have a life, a response is required, a response indicating that a meaning has been taken in. The nature of the meaning is as yet unclear until I am able to receive a response to which I must respond. "Dialogue means unpredictability and novelty -- it cannot be scripted" (p. 54). The traditional sender-receiver model of communication taught to children in past decades speaks in simplistic terms of the need for connections, but does not acknowledge enough importance of negotiation throughout the connections. "The production of meaning takes place in the dialogue and the interaction that mutually constitute the dialectic

relationship between human subjectivities and the objective world" (Giroux, 1987, p. 8).

A Cycle of Feed-back

The intent of feed-back is to respond or react to thoughts and ideas, so that useful information or guidelines for further action or development will be provided (Chambers Dictionary, 1994, p. 615). When teachers use feedback for evaluative purposes we tend to focus on the "feed" aspect of the concept and ignore the "back" aspect, hence **FEED**-back. Similar to parents, we try to feed our students so that they remain healthy, but may ignore their protestations or requests in our desire to give them what is good for them. When we respond to our students' written thoughts and ideas with written comments, we seldom offer opportunities for ongoing exchange and negotiation of meaning. However, "feedback generally works best if the person who is receiving it has a chance to respond: to explain, to amplify, to defend, to clarify, or just to acknowledge how valuable the feedback was" (Spandel and Stiggins, 1990, p. 115). The returning of the students' "marked" papers signifies an ending of the process; the product has been assessed. Students are left guessing about the intent of the teachers' comments, about how to do better next time, and the teachers are left guessing about the effectiveness of their comments.

Dewey also suggests a secondary language use; that is, to enter into more intimate sociable relations with others. It is this secondary language use that enables negotiation of meaning to occur. Peter Elbow suggests that by entering into "sociable relations" with our students and their writing we will come to like them and their work; "only if we like something will we get involved enough to work and struggle with it" (1993, p. 200). To this end we have introduced "conferences" into our evaluative processes. Through conferences we have attempted to provide a vehicle for two-way communication, collaboration between the teacher and the student that will contribute to ongoing learning and

development of both. Many teachers, recognizing that voice is part of a signifying chain, have attempted to consider issues of voice. Spivak (1990, p. 59), however, suggests that the question, "Who should speak?" is less crucial than "Who will listen?"

If creative pedagogies are to "bring to voice" those who are marginalized (such as students), there must be listeners. If everyone is voicing, who is listening? The signifying chain, "voice-speaking-listening-hearing-understanding" depends on a number of assumptions -- "that students require teachers to enable them to 'come to voice,' that teachers require listeners, that listeners require silence, that speakers require understanding, that (to come full circle) understanding can be achieved by 'coming to voice'" (Filax, 1994, p. 66). Teachers have attempted to include conferencing into their routine evaluative practices, and often have had frustrating results.

Interpretations of "Conferencing"

The concept of "conference" has many different interpretations, but the underlying intent is that it brings two people (the teacher and the students, or two students) together to talk about a piece of writing. As Atwell (1987) comments, "there isn't any one point to be made by a writing conference. A whole range of different kinds of talk, suiting different purposes, goes on..." (p. 88). Conferences vary in format, length, and style; some are brief and informal, focusing on one feature or question about a piece of writing while others are longer and more structured, surveying a larger segment of a student's work.

"Many conference teachers," suggests Murray, "are deductive" (1985, p. 147). The "conference" becomes a formal structure that occurs infrequently, usually lasting ten or fifteen minutes. There is usually an agenda set by the instructor for the conference which focuses on the work produced by the student. "The student comes to the conference to receive the evaluation of the draft and suggestions for future writing behaviour from the instructor. Students have an opportunity to respond to the instructor but they are told what is right and wrong with

the paper and what they should do about it" (p. 148). Often the teacher is attempting to respond to the set agenda in a set amount of time while also responding to the other students in the class; the student is nervous at being faced one-on-one with the teacher and is unsure how to collaborate an understanding that will be beneficial in terms of external rewards. There is an attempt here at collaboration, but I fear we are still not able to genuinely negotiate our meanings.

Cara was very excited to have a conference with me. She rushed to the desk with her work in hand, ready to tell me how good her work was. She told me how hard she had been working, how much she had written, how happy she was with her work. I attempted to focus the conference on the work she had brought with her, to discuss the writing. She glanced briefly, distracted from her agenda. She was not interested at this point in other ways she could have expressed her ideas, ways that offered insight or variety. Our conference was briefly interrupted by another student asking for advice, and then again by a student requesting an opportunity to talk with her colleague. Cara and I came back to our conference, and I found myself (with only five minutes left) suggesting -- telling -- her ways that she could improve her work, aspects of her writing that needed focus. I imposed my ideas on to her writing, instructing her how to improve. The negotiated grade that she left with had shades of the same imposition, as she realized my views, that I did not value her efforts as much as she did, and possibly that this whole situation had been contrived. I left feeling that the conference had not gone according to my intended plan, dreading the next conference that was already behind schedule, recognizing that each conference would be a struggle in which neither of us would feel heard or understood.

Such conference teaching does not allow the student to develop as a reader of the student's own drafts and the student continues to depend on the teacher for identifying problems and developing solutions. I have tended to neglect conferences in my classes, pretending that there is no time, frustrated and realizing that they have not been useful to the students' learning or to the negotiation of meaning. The language used by the teacher in a conference has a dramatic impact on its collaborative success. Language, according to

Gramsci (1971), is both hegemonic and counterhegemonic, instrumental in both silencing the voices of the oppressed and in legitimating oppressive social relations. "Language can serve either as a prison house or as the material of liberation" (Haug, 1987, p. 63). Dialogue between a teacher and a student that includes words such as "insist", "allow", "approval", "violate", "rules", "permit", "force", and "restrictions", can frame a very different set of possibilities for the student than words such as "suggest", "develop", "attempt", "guide", "show", "enable", and "encourage." The words that shape our thoughts and the language at our disposal are often cliched without our realizing it, and can serve to "prolong our containment within these [prison] walls" (Haug, p. 46). The more evaluation materials are loaded with procedures and language that are heavy with remedial and punitive overtones, the less likely people are to have positive attitudes about evaluation (McGreal, 1983). As we look at the kinds of response which teachers can offer, we begin to see that a change from a correctional-evaluation kind of response means a change in the total writing program (Searle and Dillon, 1980). Language is responsive to new thoughts, but language also generates new thoughts; it both encourages a rethinking and redevelopment of existing programs and structures.

Although teachers might value the intent of "conferences", they have found that students see conferences as vehicles for gaining personal guidance and direction from the teacher rather than a negotiation of meaning. Rather than replacing more traditional "red pen" marking, conferences have become an addition to the evaluative process. Students expect and demand each of their assignments to be "marked", and see their attempts as steps towards continual improvement, continual preparation for the "final" exam, and we as teachers and students contain ourselves within traditional evaluative processes, regardless of whether they are written or verbal.

(un)Bounded by Term-inology

In my investigation into word meanings and derivations, I have relied on the Chambers Dictionary (Schwarz, 1994) and it is from this source that my definitions have come.

I have used the words "conference" and "conversation" interchangeably but I have come to recognize fundamental differences between the words, differences that give shape to our communications. The word "confer" means "to give or bestow; to talk or consult together" whereas the word "converse" is defined as "to talk (with or about), to commune spiritually (with), to associate familiarly (with). In a giving/bestowing relationship there is a suggestion of imbalance in relationship -- one has the power to give while the other is only able to receive. Whereas a conference suggests a means of bringing people together, a conversation suggests an actual converging of ideas developed by the people, an association made closer through exchanged words. A conference suggests a more formally structured occasion for the student and teacher to talk whereas a conversation may occur informally and spontaneously.

My examination of these two particular words has caused me to consider the words we use in more general terms. I have here attempted to examine overworked words that can "cover up" or "fill in" spaces created by conferences, words that create opaque assumptions, dense in their overuse. "Language is the means to a critical consciousness which, in turn, is the means of conceiving of change and of making choices to bring about further transformations. Thus, naming the world transforms reality from 'things' in the present moment to activities in response to situations, processes, to 'becoming'" (Berthoff, 1987, p.vx). I have been inundated with words that educators use to suggest "value". These words have been appropriated from industry, law, and accounting and applied to educational settings. Such words suggest of a spectrum of responses moving from positive to negative, including: appraising, valuing, esteeming, assessing, pricing, finding, reviewing, considering, estimating, marking, scoring, adjudicating, arbitrating, judging, deciding, evaluating, rating, grading, ranking, decreeing, deeming,

concluding, criticizing, sentencing, and condemning. Each of these actions may be found, either explicitly or implicitly, in educational settings. Each of these words suggests a person who is in control of the educational situation, able to make a judgment about another, subordinate person.

Contemplating Meanings

In understanding the evaluative role of teachers, it is important to also consider the role of the student. A "student" is a person who studies; a "teacher" is a person whose profession is to impart knowledge, practical skill, and understanding. "A false binary between 'student' and 'teacher'," suggests Filax (1994), "prevents an opening up of the two roles" (p. 70). Words associated with "student" and "teacher" also can obscure the relationship between the two. The word "learn" means "to be informed, to get to know, to gain knowledge, skill or ability in" and is derived from the same source as the German word *lehren,* to teach. These words imply a relationship to a body of knowledge, but do not suggest a relationship between the persons engaging in learning. Through this lack there is an implied emphasis on the "knowledge" to be passed along from teacher to student. It is this knowledge that teachers are obliged to ensure their students have consumed. What, then, constitutes knowledge?

Knowledge, claims Lusted (1986), is not produced in the intentions of those who believe they hold it, whether in the pen or in the voice. It is produced in the process of interaction, between writer and reader upon the occasion of reading, and between teacher and learner on the occasion of classroom engagement. The word "expert", often used to describe "teacher" as the holder of knowledge, is related to the words "experience" and "experiment", words that present differing views of the roles of the teacher.

The definition of "teacher" has changed from its original meaning. The roles of the teacher have become multiple and varied, encompassing a range of expectations. Teachers are known to help, motivate, prepare, guide, nurture, control, and examine. Each of these roles suggests support of students, but in ways that are one-sided and imbalanced. The teacher is giving, the student is receiving. There is little acknowledgement through these words of a sense of "person" behind the assigned roles, the "person" of teacher and the "person" of student.

There are various words that are ascribed to students' "performances" (or to students' desired performances), words such as "excellent", "accomplished", "exceptional", "superior", and "quality." These words (implying superiority over, better than, higher in nature, rank, or excellence, and surpassing others) encourage and emphasize a continual competition of students for their teachers' favour, a desire to become "good" students. The word "failure", on the other hand, is one we all strive to avoid, a word that strikes fear into the hearts of students. This word connotes "falling short or to be lacking; proving deficient under trial."

The word "good" is spread liberally on "good" students' work, "good" idea, "good" work, "good" essay, "good" writing, "good" mark. This word is unmeasurable, suggests a positive holistic impression, and has been used effusively to the point where the word ascribes only a vague sense of well-being and morality. However, the word "good" has derived from "God" and as such has brought with it strong positive but possibly unmeasurable connotations of value, which as humans we all strive for. In contrast, we continually hear a call for evaluation that is "measure"able, "standard"ized, "object"ive, and holds teachers "account"able. This value placed on measuring has been held as far back as Galileo, who himself suggested that all things are measurable, and if they are not, must be made measurable. The value placed on measurability has become pervasive since the beginning of natural science inquiry which has dictated methodology to other disciplines.

Accountability

Measurability has continued to be valued throughout the centuries; there has been a recent resurgence of demand for measurability in education which has been labeled "accountability", emphasizing the bureaucratic metaphor. From the meaning of the verb "account" (meaning "to reckon; to judge, value; to recount"), accountability requires someone (the teacher) to be liable to account, to be responsible, explicable. Ac*count*ability through e*valu*ation, implying the accounting of value, links evaluation to accountability, links accountability to those responsible for evaluation. If teachers are accountable, to whom are they accountable? The word implies a relationship of power: I am accountable (bound/responsible) to someone else. The converse of "accountable", "not accountable", suggests the absence of a relationship and this lack restricts our freedom as teachers. Who is it that teachers are accountable to, who is it restricting our freedom? For what are we being held accountable? To whom do we recount the stories, through measurable means, of our students' successes and failures?

Teachers have been conditioned to use words and phrases that support the accountability approach to education, terms that suggest an implicit belief in the ability to measure students' (and teachers') progress and worth. We speak of "bottom lines", "falling short", "benchmarks", "assigning a grade." We refer to students "earning 50%", "worth 65%", "being assigned a grade." We "break down the marks", "break down the exam into components", "look at the figures", and "check for validity". In relation to exams, we ask our students, "Where's the biggest chunk of money?" and "Does effort necessarily equal equality?" We stream, skew, score and rank, perhaps not realizing that our very words reinforce a system that relies on "measurable outcomes" that can be checked for accuracy and reliability. The system of accountability maintains the master/slave mentality, locking us, teachers and students alike, into a system that continues to scrutinize more and more closely.

The implication of a master/slave relationship encourages teachers and students to continually be aware of scrutiny, continually needing to defend and justify their actions. This position leaves us vulnerable and fearful, feeling the effects of surveillance as an oppressive weight. The slave is never sure when he/she is being watched, and to what end. However, the slave is always vulnerable to the power wielded by the master and held accountable to masters with whom he/she cannot speak. Surveillance, according to Foucault (1977), combines with practices such as the use of the timetable, the designation of space for specialized activities, and the examination or inspection, each of which facilitates the operation and circulation of power in a wide variety of social settings including schools.

However, the master/slave relationship can be even more negative for the master than for the slave. Hegel (in Spencer and Krauze, 1996) outlines a struggle between master and slave for recognition by the other. The master/teacher position obtains recognition, but only from a being reduced and objectified, the slave/student. "There is no way for the master on his (sic) own, to escape from his own form of dependency and alienation" (p.60). The slave develops a shaky sense of respect for the master and as he/she is put to work, learns self-respect and comes to see him/her-self reflected in the work he/she has produced. Conversely, the master remains dependent on the slave for position as the slave is becoming all the while more independent. In order to maintain an existence the master/teacher must insist on a sense of dependency from the slave/student or lose recognition entirely. The master, then, lives in constant fear of losing position, losing "self" if "other" does not exist in a state of dependency. The existence of this relationship perpetuates a continual desire for control and power in order to ensure survival of "self".

As well as a demand for accountability in education is a continued demand for "quality" and "excellence" in our educational systems and in our students. The word "excellence" also requires examination, a word with an impressive veneer that appears in the goal statements of many educational documents but tends to mask real meanings or

objectives. "Excellent" is defined as "surpassing others in some good quality; extremely good". Upon examination, this definition is not specifically defined in terms of particular unique qualities. It relies on the value judgment of someone with the power to impose a such a judgment, someone able to define that which is "good." The concept of excellence has been appropriated in education and redefined as "basic skills, technical training, and classroom discipline" (Giroux,1987, p. 8). As members of Western society, we are continually seeking ways to surpass others in our struggle for the attainment of excellence, relying on others to judge and reward our worth. Those in control of the messages we read (advertisements, newspaper articles, slogans) are able to impose values and desires on the consumers of these messages. "Excellence" and "quality" have become words empty of value, with meanings created through imposed criteria and related to material worth, meaning-less in terms of education.

The Shifting "we"

An examination of the language teachers choose to use in order to convey educational ideas brings to light many powerful signifiers indicating action and description, such as: "achieve", "teach", "learn", "know", "excellent", "successful", "superior", "inspired". These words hold within themselves a rich history and a promise for the future. There are, however, other signifiers such as "I", "you", "we", and "they" that are only capable of signifying in concrete discursive situations. Personal pronouns are a class of words that escape the status of all the other signs of language (Benveniste, in Silverman, p. 43) and often, in their in-significance, escape our notice. These signifiers have "unstable value"; 'we' refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this it designates the speaker.

In one journal entry, for example, I write: "**We** have, after all, their CUM files that prove what type of students they are, their abilities. **We** can easily assess how well they fit into the system **we** have spent years developing." In this entry 'we' takes on a patriarchal representation of society. I am speaking as part of the symbolic order,

society in general. In the same journal entry, two paragraphs later, I write, "**We** all select brightly-coloured folders, write our names on them, and create a table of contents for our portfolios. **We** also begin dialogue journals, in which **we** can record our thoughts about the literature **we** are reading" (emphases added later). In this section "we" refers to the students and myself as a community of learners. As Benveniste (1973) suggests, "we" does not signify a "multiplication of identical objects, but a junction between the 'I' and the 'non-I.' This "not-I" can be either personal ("we" = "me" and "you") or impersonal ("we" = "me" and "them"). I continue to shift from impersonal to personal, indicating our individual struggles to find positions for ourselves as we negotiate the tensions between the different positions in which we locate ourselves.

Shifting "we" can also enable a shifting of responsibility; I can choose which "we" I want to represent, and want to represent <u>me</u>, whether it is a "we" I have control over, or a "we" that imposes control. The "we" can easily shift to "they" if I feel too closely scrutinized as a part of a group. I can abdicate even my impersonal association with a group ("me" + "them") and shift the focus to the "them" as I slide into an anonymous gap.

I struggle to find a place for myself amidst the shifting "we"s. I write about teachers, and see <u>myself</u> in the classroom facing the same difficulties as each teacher must face. I write about teachers, and see <u>other</u> teachers involved in situations that I cannot understand, that I can only observe. As "we" I may engage in teacher discourse; as "they" I feel distanced from teacher discourse and must resort to researcher discourse, system discourse, discourse of the "other" or of the "Other."

<u>Defining Evaluation</u>

The meanings I ascribe to words also change as I shift my subjectivity. As a teacher I ascribe a meaning to the word "evaluation" that is different to the meaning I give as a student. As a teacher I am concerned with giving evaluation; as a student I am concerned with

receiving evaluation. Lowe and Bintz (1992) offer the following questions as examples of differing viewpoints that challenge existing meanings and assumptions given to the meaning of the related word "assessment".

> *How can you have reliability in **assessment** if it isn't the same every day?*
>
> This question presupposes the need for assessment to be scientifically based, with the emphasis on producing consistent and reliable results.
>
> *How do you report the outcomes of alternative **assessment** at a state or national level?*
>
> This question assumes the need to convert qualitative data into statistical information.
>
> *How can we get reflective instruction and curriculum or teacher judgement reflected in an efficient and useable form in the monitoring function of **assessment**?*
>
> The question appears to assume that evaluation is a monitoring activity that can be condensed to a numerical value (p. 12-13).

Perspective changes the meaning of words such as "assessment", "evaluation", and "testing"; usage also changes meanings. Although we interchange one word for another, synonyms really do not exist in language. One word does not "stand in" for another. Each word holds its own unique and distinct meaning, and each user of language has her/his own understanding of the words being used. The meaning of a word may change as roles shift, and also as each individual brings unique past experiences to a word.

Educators who write about evaluation each have unique interpretations of the words they select to use to give a judgement of students' work: evaluate, assess, rank, grade, respond, mark. Recent literature suggests a variety of definitions for these terms:

evaluation - placing emphasis on how well the paper is doing what it does, on how close the paper seems to come to what it is trying to do (Christenbury, 1992); looking hard and thoughtfully at a piece of

writing in order to make distinctions as to the quality of different features or dimensions (Elbow, 1993); looking at how things are going; the means by which we value something, synonymous with inquiry; letting students know how well they have measured up to a set of criteria or standards; assessing value, whether of an experience or a product, according to criteria which have been determined by interested parties, such as teachers, students, parents, and community; to investigate the outcome of a decision (Lowe and Bintz, 1992); an attempt to identify and explain the effects (and effectiveness) of the teaching (Rowntree, 1977); the product of assessment, a detailed and thoughtful look at the students' work and progress, based on all the information that has been gathered on a daily basis over a long period of time (Strickland, 1993)

assessment - taking a closer look at students' writing (Spandel, 1990); one person, in some kind of interaction, consciously obtaining and interpreting information about the knowledge and understanding, or abilities and attitudes, of another person (Rowntree, 1977); some different ways in which we express or frame our judgements of value (Elbow, 1993); collection of data that allows evaluation to take place (Strickland, 1993)

ranking - summing up one's judgment of a performance or person into a single, holistic number or score (Elbow, 1993)

grading - a letter or numerical designation and some sort of final evaluative comment (Christenbury, 1994); assumes that the teaching is essentially beyond reproach, and that the student is to be rewarded according to how well he/she has discharged his/her responsibility to learn from it, and that this will be revealed objectively and reliably by assessment (Rowntree, 1977); a single symbol that stands for a wide range of students' performances in class (Tchudi, 1989); involving primarily an evaluative process for the intent of communicating information using symbols, a comparative framework for the interpretation of grades is needed (Kushniruk, 1994)

responding - talking to students, writer to writer, reader to writer, attempting to 1) link something the student has written to (the teacher) personally, 2) tell the student what (the teacher) likes about

what he/she has written, and 3) ask the student questions about the draft (Christenbury, 1993)

testing - possible means of assessment (Rowntree, 1977); to try or examine critically (Schwarz, 1994)

marking - to make a mark on, to indicate, to record, to put marks on a child's written work to show where it is correct or incorrect (Schwarz, 1994); possible outcome of assessment (Rowntree, 1977); the commonest term that refers to assessment (Gannon, 1985).

The range of definitions for each of the words suggests considerable discrepancy of meaning. The definitions are messy and unclear. The definitions are affected by the objectives and intents we set for each of the activities, the situations in which we are involved, the values and beliefs we hold about education, and the assumptions we bring to the educational setting. The teachers who worked with me for a term in their high school setting implemented a variety of "evaluative" activities and approaches. In answer to the question "What are we doing when we try to mark?" one teacher commented, "I am trying to correct errors, and to reinforce my previous teaching. I think that evaluation ignores and tends to negate our genuine teaching and learning, especially the way it is structured in our system -- we teach 'stuff' and then test to see how well it has been remembered and understood -- that is what we mean by evaluation." This comment seems to suggest a frustration with the existing evaluation system, a confusion of the role(s) of evaluation and the part that we as teachers play, and a "caughtness" in the roles we try to play as teachers and as evaluators.

Interpretations of Definitions: Scenarios

The teachers I worked with demonstrated many types of evaluative approaches, attempting to find methods to support their teaching strategies. The types of experiences we have structured for our

students frame us in our constructed beliefs and values, bind us to particular understandings of teaching and learning. The following descriptions give examples of evaluative practices that have occured in a variety of classrooms.

The students had been given a series of questions that they were to answer regarding a chapter of a novel for a novel study. They handed in their answers at the end of the class, and teacher marked each response, awarding one, two or five marks as the difficulty of the question suggested. Each assignment was marked, and a total grade given at the top of the page. The students received their work back, with the numerical grade, and no written comments. If the students wished, they could ask the teacher for clarification or justification of their grade.

(It would be interesting to reverse the binary, give points for the most difficult questions they could write for the novel, or for the most insightful comments they could generate.)

The students were asked to select ten poems that they liked from the poetry anthology. They were to write personal responses to each of the poems, telling why they selected the poems that they did. The teacher collected in their assignments with the intention of marking their work. However, as she read through each one of them, she realized that she was not able to evalute them, they were so personally revealing. There was no suitable criteria for evaluation, other than the fact that they had been completed appropriately and the superficial features of spelling, neatness and grammar that were visible. The teacher decided not to give the responses a grade, but rather assigned an effort mark for work completed. This was a departure from what she had told the students, but there were no complaints or questions.

(This is an example of an ethical response in the psychoanalytic discourse -- namely that you respect each response and desire because it is that which makes the person unique.)

In another class a form of peer assessment was being implemented. The students had each completed an essay. The teacher divided the class into five groups of five students and after collecting the papers, divided them up randomly and distributed them to the groups, one paper per student. The only stipulation was that the student who wrote the paper did not get her/his own paper back. Then the groups read each of the papers and ranked them from best work to worst work, arrived at a group concensus, and then returned them to the teacher. The teacher then took the best ranked one from each group and redistributed them to the groups. One group got the best five, one group got the next best five, etc., until each set of five papers was redistributed. Again the groups were asked to rank the papers from best to worst. The intention of this activity was to have students read each others' work, to appreciate the work of their peers, and also to appreciate their own work. The students did not have to justify their choices to the teacher, but they did have to justify them to their group members in making the rankings. The papers were then evaluated by the teacher, in a more formal manner consisting of red pen comments and a grade out of fifty marks.

(What is happening here? There is a question of multi-perspectives being opened up. The issue of self-ranking to have the discourse of evaluation fall in on itself. This is deconstructive.)

Another evaluation scheme involved using a criterion scale, actually the one developed by the provincial Department of Education for the external exams. The criteria, then, were externally developed rather than being developed by the teacher or by the student. However, they are very detailed and are standardized across the province. Each student has received a detailed copy of the scoring criteria from which the teacher selects aspects to evalute the written assignments for the year. The criteria were established ahead of time, communicated to the students, and made adaptable to different assignments (often weighted differently). However, despite the detail in which the criteria had been written, the students still believed that the grade put on their paper was arbitrarily assigned by the teacher, and they could see no

connection between the number and the descriptors. They could not relate the descriptors to their own work, and indeed did not know what many of the descriptors were referring to when they were asked to review them.

(The students rely on the authority of the teacher to judge the value of their work; they saw no need to seek understanding of the descriptors.)

The students in a grade ten English class were asked to select a short story that interested them and prepare a lesson on the story to teach to the class. The students had a variety of texts from which to choose a story but were not limited by the texts. One group chose to write their own short story. The students were asked to present ideas regarding the structure of the short story form, develop a summary of the particular story, and create activities that would help the rest of the class understand the story. The presentations would take forty-five to fifty minutes and at the end of the presentation, the students were required to give their colleagues a test on the information they had presented. The teacher then gave a holistic assessment of the presentation and the written information, the students assessed their work in a group, and an "applause" metre was used to determine the enthusiasm of the class for each group's presentation.

(What enabled the teacher to suspend her authority in the class? And what prompted the teacher to desire a test to be given?)

Our evaluative strategies are inextricably bound to our personal understandings and beliefs about education and about students, developing into assumptions that continue unexamined. We need to devise ways for ourselves as teachers and learners to "interrupt" those discursive practices that may be counterproductive to teaching and learning (Brodkey, 1992, p. 310). We are continually caught between the valuing of our own personal (practical) knowledge which is often unarticulated and the theoretical knowledge that is clearly articulated and shared by a larger community. "Conventional wisdom says that theory and practice go hand in hand. That does not mean, of course, that we are necessarily aware of either our theories or practices, or that we understand how they are related to one another" (Brodkey, p.

306). The language of theory and the language of practice, while sharing similar words, often needs interpreting and bridging. It cannot be assumed that shared words are equivalent to shared meanings or shared experiences.

Our own past experiences may offer insights into the ways we construct our beliefs and values and the ways we shape our educational knowledge. Many evaluative experiences are negative:

-- a high school English teacher showed me the product of her grading labours -- student essays with red ink bled all over the pages -- acts of violence done to the fragile and tentative words of the students

-- a first year English paper dissected by the instructor with scathing comments attacking the student's thoughts as well as harshly criticizing the student's words

-- a presentation in a class that I had laboured over for long hours, only to have it received with vague words of unfocused appreciation and quick dismissal

-- a student who had his paper returned with a grade of 23%; in addition, the teacher asked the student's permission to share this example of terrible writing with the entire class.

Our protective memories select those stories or interpretations which will support and protect us. However, if we want to "interrupt" and change our practices as we strive to develop and grow, we may need to examine memories that are not positive and confirming, ones we may have chosen to ignore but which still exist and influence us. "Despite our desire to lose ourselves in the living depths of our work, we are constrained to distance ourselves from it in order to speak of it" (Starobinski in Jay, 1993, p. 20).

Re-viewing Clarity

Learning takes on a new meaning when it is understood through multiple perspectives. Like Alice in her wonderland, we need different vantage points from which to view the world; but, unlike Alice, we

cannot merely sip from a bottle in order to change our perspective. Greene (1995) suggests that, although it is important to understand multiple perspectives, "the vision that sees things small looks at schooling through the lenses of a system ... [and] is preoccupied with test scores, time on task, management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures, while it screens out the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living person" (p. 11). The vision that sees things big brings us in close contact with details and particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable. It is this understanding and vision that we need in order to "... provoke learners to pose their own questions, to teach themselves, to go at their own pace, to name their worlds" (p. 11), in order to create multiple senses of clarity.

Layers of understanding of evaluation are formed through a balance of perspectives. These multiple perspectives create spaces and gaps in which we can re-view and re-form our reading of student contexts. When teachers read their students' texts, they attempt to focus on both what is being said and how it is being said -- to look close up at the ideas developed and connections being made as well as to look from a distance at the technical aspects of the text. The distanced position, however, is often more inviting, for several reasons. It is easier to correct than to connect with a text, neater and more easily understandable to the owner of the text as well as the evaluator. The objectivity of "correctness" of the writing does not engage or challenge the subjectivity of the ideas that respresent the individual.

A study of teacher response to student writing, conducted in 1980 by Searle and Dillon, was prompted because the researchers saw that "a major aspect of the teaching of writing was teaching through marking" (p. 781). The study indicated that teachers focused primarily on form, and used the roles of instructor and evaluator most frequently. We as busy teachers are seduced by the need for clarity and simplicity -- both of student writing and of our own marking. We fear the complexity and messiness of responding to the ideas and thoughts that students attempt to develop in their writing. Tobin (1991) suggests

that teachers play a crucial but generally misunderstood role in our students' writing processes -- "we continue to oversimplify the teacher's reading or interpretive processes" (p. 335). We need to understand our responses as complex texts in their own right and to recognize the "sophisticated rhetorical work" (Lawson,1989, p. 169) they actually do.

> While we have come to see writing as socially constructed, we have failed to understand the teacher's role in the construction of that meaning. We need to develop a theory of reading student texts which takes into account our reading of the students themselves, of our own unconscious motivations and associations, and finally, of the interactive and dialectical nature of the student-teacher relationship. (Tobin, p. 335)

Clarity does not necessarily mean simplicity. In our attempts to attain clarity we as teachers and students need to recognize the multiplicity of understandings that are possible. What are the possibilities for understanding how teachers shape and influence student writing and how, in return, that writing shapes and influences teachers? Until we are willing to acknowledge the messiness and multiplicity of clarity, to broaden our definition of clarity, and to create gaps within our understandings of the ideal of clarity, we will continue to contain ourselves and our students in simplistic and measurable experiences. We will continue to see dandelions through eyes that always recognize dandelions as yellow and round.

7

Re(flex)ing: Revisioning Power

I watched a fly
land crawl near to my shoe
annoying creature --
I readied my foot to squash it

but something in the warmth of the sun
and the mellow radiating green
gave me
pause

why bother
a fly
crawling by my
foot?

In fact, its pale green body
filtered through irridescent wings
captured my interest
my imagining took flight
with the fly
who soared off to a new world

Understanding Power

"Power" is a word with many nuances and applicabilities, ranging from power that can destroy the world to the power found in a glance. Power can refer to imposition (as in omnipotence, strength, authority, force, might), to persuasion (such as with pressure, influence, torque), or to inner strength (as in energy, ability, competency, efficacy, and validity). There is a power from within that is in continual danger of being subsumed by imposed powers.

Classroom teaching and evaluation practices are intimately connected to issues of power and control. Through exercising power, we as teachers can both shape/control our environments and protect our "selves" from changes that are distasteful and unsupportive of our beliefs. As teachers we shape our classrooms and have perceived responsibilities of leading our students to greater knowledge and understanding, even if they do not want to go. We lead the proverbial students to water, and we must make them drink, for their own good.

I never give students a "zero" on an assignment, one teacher commented. I insist that all assignments get completed. I make them come in at lunch if I have to so they can finish.

We see it as our job to educate our students. If they fail (as judged through examinations), we also fail. Failure reduces our own personal power, but encourages the use of imposed power in order to reduce future chances of failure.

One teacher comments, "I sometimes feel that I am being evaluated when my students write exams, I think they look at the results.... I haven't ever heard of anybody being spoken to about their results, and the whole idea of these exams was that teachers were never going to be ranked, but I know that's nonsense otherwise they wouldn't be taking the time to do it.

"They" is not clearly defined and there is no evidence that teachers are being evaluated, but the notion of surveillance developed by

Foucault (1977) seems strong here for this teacher, a sense that "they" have the power and are continually watching.

Constructions of Power

Power is socially constructed and shapes most of our relationships. Power gives authority and legitimacy to particular voices of society, authority gained through the possession of physical strength, material wealth, position, age, knowledge, or foresight. As teachers and as adults we have the foresight to recognize that the power of knowledge can lead to "success" in material ways and we feel charged with the responsibility of "giving" that knowledge to our students, enabling them to be successful on exams. However, students do not always see the relevance of course material in the same way as the teachers.

Why are we learning this? I'll never use this once I finish school. How is this relevant to me?

These questions are often voiced by students who are not able to make connections in their learning and who do not possess the foresight to recognize how their learning might be of benefit to them in the future. "Trust me," we say, "we know it is good for you." Our professed goal is to develop independent learners and thinkers who will not need us to "teach" them. Therefore we feel the need to equip them with the knowledge that those of us with power recognize will help them to become independent learners.

Traditional concepts of power have also implied a hierarchy -- by virtue of position, wealth, knowledge, strength or age. "Power was what was seen, what was shown and what was manifested" (Foucault in Gore, 1993, p. 52). As teachers, we have more or less power than our colleagues, than other members of society. We have status that relates to knowledge and position, in the eyes of students, colleagues, and society in general. We have earned our positions by working through a recognized institution (university) and we possess the knowledge that

students perceive they need. We have the power to disseminate that knowledge as we deem appropriate. However, Foucault has examined notions of power that challenge the hierarchical structures. He suggests that "power is exercised and practiced rather than possessed, and so circulates, passing through every related force" (in Gore, p. 52). Power is not necessarily repressive; students as well as teachers can exercise power.

The shift from sovereign, visible power, to "disciplinary" power is an important distinction for teachers to consider. Disciplinary power is exercised through its invisibility, but at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. It is the subjects who have to be seen, and their visibility assures the hold of power that is exercised over them (Foucault, 1977, p. 187). The "viewers", however, are not easily seen or identified; therefore the source of power is not easily identifiable and may come from any/everywhere.

Teachers' Power

The position of teacher, like that of parent, *assumes* power. Once we have achieved teacher status, society grants us the power to teach, to control, and to discipline in order to produce successful students (success being measured by examinations and grades). We assume a need for power in order to eliminate chaos, to maintain order and to provide organization in the classroom and in the school. Through the assumptions we make that we have the *right* to power by virtue of our position, and the *need* for power by virtue of the nature of children, we begin to see the world through our lens of power. We can lose our ability to see multiple perspectives and to understand different points of view. There becomes only one way to see, a way that can be (and we come to think should be) imposed on all of the students. As teachers, after all, we know better than our students; we have skills and knowledge not yet attained by students. Through our vision that becomes more singular and narrowly focused, we lose the sensitivity to understand others' perspectives that we, as less powerful and

experienced teachers, once had, the sensitivity to recognize unique experiences and moments that can shape the learning in our classrooms. We become desensitized to everything but our own agenda as the assumption of power dominates. We stop questioning, stop looking for alternatives responses, stop appreciating variety. Power not only produces knowledge that distorts reality created from a shared understanding but also produces a particular version of the "truth" (Foucault, 1980). A dangerous impact of power is its positive relation to "truth", the effects of "truth" that it produces. The complex and unstable process of discourse can be an instrument and an effect of power, but can also be a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance -- a gap -- and a starting point for an opposing strategy (Foucault in Gore, 1993). Teachers, as representative of our school systems, can "play a major role in the legitimization of inequality; that is, in socializing students to accept the unequal features of the larger society" (McLaren, 1989, p. 10). Our evaluative processes of marking and ranking often perpetuate the inequalities of society. However, we do have opportunities to interrupt and change the processes through reflexive discourse. Foucault has argued that power and knowledge are connected through discourse. However, it sometimes appears that power is maintained through lack of knowledge. If we as teachers are unaware of the students' beliefs and ideas, we do not feel a need to engage in discourse that questions our dominant power position.

Power can be very seductive and can create a desire for and an addiction to ongoing power. Once we have assumed the right to power, we can shape our words to create convincing arguments that support our vision. As experienced readers and writers, we have the capability of using ideas and language to convince, persuade, assure, insist. We can create jargonized language (matters of choice, insightful ideas, syntactical structures, fluent composition) or use the expressions created by others (often those in positions of power or authority) that becomes inaccessible to students, securing our positions as "authority" through the power of language. We even believe we can gain a type of omniscient power as we attempt, as one teacher described it, to "get into the minds of the kids" through our conversations with

them and through the comments we exchange with them. As we lose our sensitivity to the "other" when we gain increasingly more impositional power, we also lose our understanding of the power of the "other" to subvert and alter existing situations.

Power Imposed

Power that is imposed on students "for their own good" is not always appreciated by the students. It is sometimes necessary to find ways to control and subjugate them. Teachers often use words that insist on compliance: we "make" our students complete the work, "make" them follow an appropriate format, "force" them to read texts with literary merit, and "insist" upon a required length for their assignments. We won't accept work if it's late, or too messy, and give a "zero" if doesn't comply with the evaluation criteria we have set for them. If students are subjected in the classroom to a language as well as a set of beliefs and values whose implicit message is that they are culturally illiterate, students will learn very little about critical thinking, and a great deal about what Freire has called the 'culture of silence'" (Giroux, 1988, p. 48).

I observed a class in which one student was attempting to explain "allusion" to another student. The student was interrupted by the teacher and told to look at the glossary. The teacher then immediately gave the definition to the student and asked "Did you have it right, John?" "Well," he replied, I just began and then you interrupted me, so...."

In future, the student might find it more useful to refer directly to the teacher without attempting to find the answer for himself.

Since the demise of corporal punishment, more subtle and "gentle" forms of control have been developed. Our system of rewards and punishments has focused on "motivators" such as exams and grades. We have claimed power over the students through methods of

evaluation. We assess the worth of the students through the work that they complete for us. The pain that we threaten them with is much less obvious, but often much more severe, than that of physical pain. Students fear, perhaps more than the flexing of physical power, the flexing of psychological power. One teacher spoke of the possible embarrassment and humiliation felt by students who have not received a "good" mark for their assignment. Poor marks could be demoralizing and cause the student to fear further assessments of her/his worth. The teacher recognized that students are fearful of exams, exams "strike fear in their hearts... When we make very negative comments, where we're referring to the essay but the student takes it very personally, that negative comment can be quite devastating." Another teacher comments, "I really don't give much thought, or as much thought as I should, to how they perceive my comments... it's quite overwhelming." We do not intend to inflict pain on students irresponsibly or thoughtlessly, *only for their own good.* One teacher has tried to soften the blow by substituting the comment "please see me" rather than writing a negative comment. When the student does comply and come to see the teacher, the negative comments can be delivered in a more personal and humane way.

Power Imposed Through Evaluation

Evaluation serves to reinforce the power structures that exist in schools. Students continue to rely on their teachers to "know" how well they are doing. They positively anticipate the return of their assignments, in the hopes that the teacher's judgment has been favourable, even though their hopes are often not recognized. "I like getting back the assignments I had a good feeling about," commented one student. "It's most important to do what the teacher wants, give her what she asks for, and think about the way she's going to want it." Another student said, "I expected a better mark, because I thought I'd included everything that was required. There were lots of check marks on my paper, and a few other comments.

Evaluative comments written by the teacher have both positive and negative impacts on the students. On the positive side, comments can build confidence and self-esteem in the students as they come to realize their capabilities and strengths. The students can be directed to think about the commendable elements of their style (Shuman, 1979); the evaluation of student writing can emphasize the worth of each of the student's efforts (Tiedt, 1989). On the negative side, however, comments about students' writing can be seen as a "destruction of self-concept" (Caine and Caine, 1991), causing feelings of anxiety, shame, insecurity, and helplessness which may fester into feelings of resentment and rage (Miller, 1983). There are many mentions of humiliation (McLaren, 1989; Giroux, 1988), pain (Glasser, 1993; McLaren, 1986; Scarry, 1986; Spandel and Stiggens, 1990) and violence (Christenbury, 1994; Freire, 1979). "This pain is made legible in the body postures and facial expressions of the students; it is inscribed in the tight mouths, clenched jaws, hunched shoulders and angry glares" (McLaren, 1986), or it remains private and secret because of the unsharability of pain, the shame students feel about their failures.

Some teachers have recognized the potential pain and humiliation inflicted by harsh comments and have attempted to ease the students' suffering. One example already cited was the use of a comment "please see me" rather than violating the student's text with negative comments. Another example is teachers' recognition of the visual harshness of using red ink to deface the students' work and attempts to find alternatives in an attempt to be sensitive to how students react to the marks on their work (Christenbury, 1994, p. 193). One teacher comments that her spelling and grammar corrections are done in pencil, neatly and small, in an attempt to be respectful of the students' work. Hart (1991) decided to use pencil "as a symbolic reminder of erasibility, trust, and belongingness" (p. 157) and forswore writing tools which implied that his responses to students' writing were permanently correct, distrustfully suspicious, or objectively inhuman.

Teachers are not inhuman, but sometimes the power inherent in our role enables us to forget the perspectives of the students in our desire to structure and control our environment. We can remember teachers who "screamed at students, slammed rulers on desks and threw chalkboard brushes against the back wall... even now," wrote Betty Dean, "whenever I think about that teacher my stomach hurts and the fear of vomiting returns" (Dean, 1995, p. 36). An environment of fear does not support student learning. Neither does an environment of continual correction. As Tobin (1991) recalls, "I read their [the students'] texts looking more for problems than for possibilities" (p. 342). Tobin continuously found himself in the role of judge (Gilbert, 1989, p. 52), the conveyor of harsh verdicts as he read his students' texts, attempting to "help" his students improve by pointing out their faults. The inflictor of pain (the teacher) stands as a representative of the social category to which the victim (the student) is either being assimilated or contrasted, depending on the judgment pronounced by the teacher (McLaren, 1986, p. 169). The student usually acquiesces to the teacher's comments, but no further active involvement or learning takes place.

Teachers as oppressors (Freire, 1987) are as caught in the struggle with power as much as the students, the oppressed. Most teachers do not wish to maintain their positions of power at the expense of their students' self-esteem. However, we gradually assume a mindset similar to those who dominate and oppress, and lose critical consciousness because it is not reinforced or affirmed by the environment (hooks, in Weis and Fine,1993, p. 3).

Teachers feel considerable stress when evaluating the work of their students, forced into a system where they must continually grade and rank the efforts of their students. Teachers, as well as students, feel bored by the thought of completing and grading assignments decided by the teacher; neither teacher nor student has any personal interest invested into the work. Writing was never meant to be read in sets of twenty-five, or fifty, or seventy-five (Elbow, 1993, p. 203). Teachers, too, can feel resentment at being caught in a system that

dictates the use of many hours being spent marking assignments. The power of the system overwhelms the teachers as well as the students.

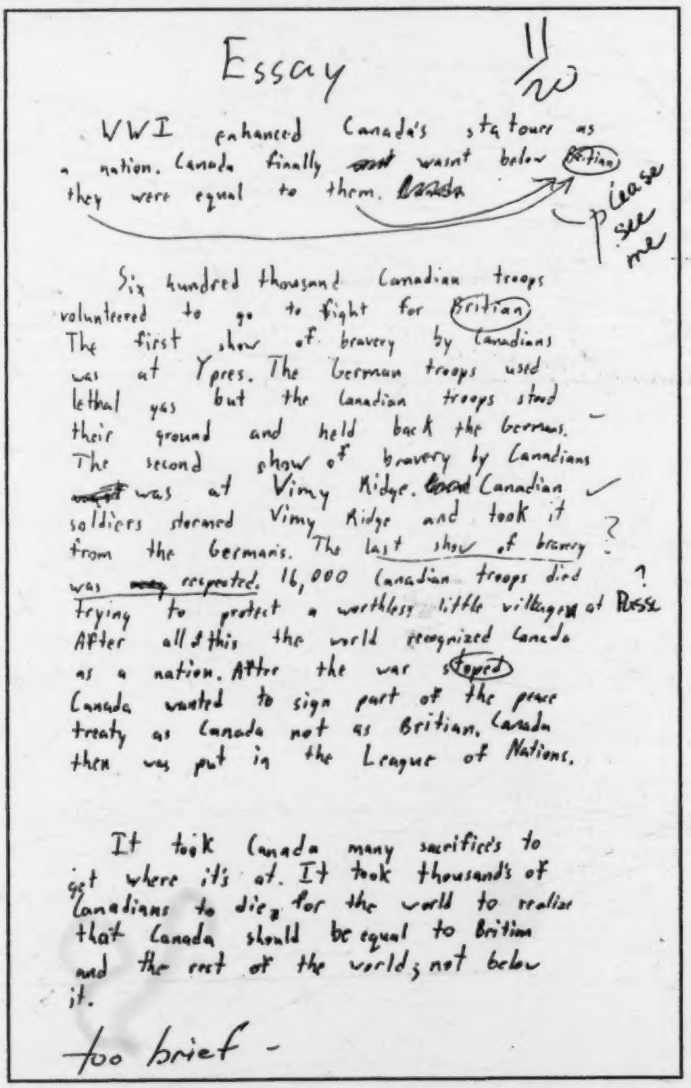
Grades and evaluation in general have so permeated the school system that everyone has become addicted to their use; despite the obvious harmful effects, students and teachers have become "hooked" on grades (Tchudi, 1989, p. 384). When teachers wish to move away from assigning grades to their students' work, they feel pressured by their colleagues to conform to the accepted approach to evaluation. One teacher commented,

> I might say to the students, 'Okay, based on all of the things I've devised to evaluate this, which you've been involved in, I want you to now rank you and your colleagues in terms of the energy you've put into the piece, and I also want you to mark yourself according to the scale we've devised, and see if our marks come up the same and if they don't, let's negotiate, let's start negotiating marks.' A lot of people would say, that's really wishy-washy, that's sitting on the fence, you're just scared to give marks. I'm not scared to give marks,but I'm trying to get kids to get a sense of involvement in their own work.

It is a fearful thing for teachers to try to move out of one evaluative paradigm into another, one that is not supported by any of their colleagues. It takes courage "to abandon the most ancient of all our educational traditions -- teach, test, and then rank students by the test scores" (Glasser, 1993, p. 92). Often teachers refuse to recognize the oppressive and irrational character of structures imposed on them, or they declare their powerlessness: "They say we have to do it" (Berthoff, 1987, p. xx).

We intend to target the cognitive learning domain when we devise evaluation criteria, scoring guides, evaluative comments, and grades for our students' work. We intend to give feedback to our students regarding a particular piece of work. What we keep hitting instead with our comments is the affective learning domain, our emotional rather

than our intellectual selves, what we <u>feel</u> rather than what we <u>know</u>. When we respond to a student's writing with comments, the whole person reads the comments, not just the "student" part of the person. Therefore it is very difficult to focus on the cognitive aspect without also arousing the affective aspect; both are irrevocably intertwined. Students' self-concept is shaped by the type of feedback they get and the manner in which the feedback is communicated (Caine and Caine, 1991). All forms of assessment affect our feelings and perceived self. As suggested in the following example, presented as Figure 7-1,



Essay

WWI enhanced Canada's statours as a nation. Canada finally ~~cost~~ wasn't below Britian they were equal to them. ~~Canada~~

please see me

Six hundred thousand Canadian troops volunteered to go to fight for Britian. The first show of bravery by Canadians was at Ypres. The German troops used lethal gas but the Canadian troops stood their ground and held back the Germans. The second show of bravery by Canadians ~~was~~ was at Vimy Ridge. ~~Canadian~~ Canadian soldiers stormed Vimy Ridge and took it from the Germans. The last show of bravery was ~~not~~ recognized. 16,000 Canadian troops died trying to protect a worthless little villages at Ypres. After all of this the world recognized Canada as a nation. After the war stopped Canada wanted to sign part of the peace treaty as Canada not as Britian. Canada then was put in the League of Nations.

It took Canada many sacrifices to get where it's at. It took thousands of Canadians to die, for the world to realize that Canada should be equal to Britian and the rest of the world; not below it.

too brief -

Figure 7-1 Sample of "Marked" Student Writing

this type of evaluation is commonly practiced, yet is literally incomprehensible to the students. How is a student to cope with and learn from the corrections, the comments, and the numerical grade? To 'cope with' errors means not only correcting the error, but understanding the principle underlying the error and being able to avoid it another time (Shuman, 1979). Our comments, then, not only cause students pain, but do not serve to help them understand -- the comments reach the affective but not the cognitive learning domain.

Power, although often the cause of discomfort, can also afford us a measure of security and comfort. Not only do we not have to ask questions, but we do not need to answer them either. We have created a teaching "scheme" that, because we represent the "authority", is not questioned. We also have had a teaching scheme created for us (the curriculum) by a higher authority that both supports and generates the work we do. The "curriculum" is supported by our belief that it is an important power and by our willingness to use the curriculum to shape our teaching. The curriculum is also reinforced through the exams given to test whether the students have "learned" the curriculum, and whether we have taught the curriculum. "The exams are not assessment-driven exams, they're curriculum-driven; they are geared toward the curriculum," comments one teacher. This teacher sees the curriculum as a controlling force, but possibly does not make the connections between curriculum and exams which both control the learning. The power of the curriculum and external exams that is imposed on us reduces the need for questioning as we shape our role in helping students achieve "success".

Most teachers are not looking for power in the nature of world power, nor are we looking for self-aggrandizing power. We are often caught in a system that advocates imposed power, but we also find ourselves using the power assigned to the role of "teacher" in order to help our students achieve "success". Through discursive practices in the classroom, such as group activities and conferencing, we have made conscious attempts to restructure the nature of power in order to

create a more equal balance between the role of "teacher" and the role of "student" in education and in evaluation.

Imposed power can be characterized by a focus on the group rather than the individual, and it attempts to control the masses by viewing them as "objects" that can be manipulated rather than as thinking, self-willed "subjects." These "objects" are controlled through various means such as threats, fear, promises of rewards and the use of language that, although not consciously intended, bullies, brainwashes, and jargonizes. "Fortunately, this assignment isn't worth much so it won't hurt you" and "That's a zero for that assignment, and you're on my hit list" are comments that I have heard teachers make to their students. Students hear words such as "matters of choice", "conferencing", "thought and detail", "insight", "perceptive response", "syntax", and "fluent and confident composition" and see lines slashed through words and phrases on their papers.

One teacher returned a set of assignments to the students; they accepted the papers with almost furtive glances at the marks, no comments to the teacher or to each other, and then filed them automatically and silently in their binders.

Gilligan suggests that "what is unvoiced or unspoken, because it is out of relationship, tends to get out of perspective and to dominate psychic life" (1993, p. 5). When students do not see an opportunity to talk about their marks and their struggles, a negative sense of themselves is constructed that continues to grow and shape "out of relationship", out of context. The students continually hope for a "mark" that symbolizes 100%, perfect work, and they are continually disappointed. However, although this desire shapes the way they view all of their "marks", they are unaware that their goal is virtually unattainable.

Persuasive power, on the other hand, is characterized by a focus on the individual who may also exist as part of a group. There exists a dialogic process that enables the exchange of ideas and negotiation of

meaning to occur, and a genuineness in the belief that individuals learn from each other. Thiessen and Moorhead (in Kushniruk, 1994, p. 28) refer to these understandings of imposed and persuasive power as "responsive" and "interactive"; the way that teachers think about evaluation depends on whether they have a "responsive or "interactive" approach to teaching. A teacher with a responsive or impositional orientation would apply age, grade, or program norms as the basis for evaluation (accountability to outside); in contrast, a teacher with an interactive or persuasive orientation would use the experiences and progress of the students as the basis for evaluation (accountability from outside).

Those teachers who rely on imposed power lack trust of the "others", their students who exist around them and who rely upon them. This lack may stem from an absence of self-confidence to enable students to learn and confidence in the abilities of individuals to learn for themselves. We develop a sense of confidence through the knowledge that the system is there to support us. In order to impose power we must belong to a strong and solid group, whose values and methods we value. This "group" demands regular evidence of success and learning in order to support its agenda and to prove its power and its effectiveness. Thus there is a continual call for "accountability", which holds each individual answerable to other individuals higher in the hierarchy, and perpetuates the imposition of power.

Educators who employ persuasive means of power have developed an implicit trust in the individuals with whom they work, believing in the ability and worth of each individual. They are more willing to postpone the call for evidence of learning, believing in the powers of the individuals to provide demonstrations of learning when they are required. These educators have a desire to influence their students' learning rather than a desire to control their learning. An environment of control and fear does not support student learning. "The measure of a school's success ... should be based on the relationships that exist. The quality of those relationships is the foundation upon which all behavioural expectations must rest and to which all actions must be

accountable. Everything comes back to those relationships -- whether students can successfully express difficulties with the curriculum, whether they feel safe enough to risk demonstrating what they have learned and whether they care enough to contribute to learning" (Dean, 1995, p. 36). Relationships do not develop in a system of fear and control.

Balancing Power through Evaluative Means

Teachers are continually searching for ways to genuinely rebalance the power that exists in schools, in order to give their students authentic voice and to claim voice for themselves, to create and reshape the relationships that exist between teachers and students, between teachers and administrators. We attempt to "empower" ourselves and our students through activities that enable independence and creativity of thought, activities such as journals, writing and reading workshops, choices developed in projects and in readings, and conferences. We "empower" our students through negotiation and collaboration, a true rebalancing of the power to learn rather than a superficial doling out of a little more flexibility and variety to our students.

However, regardless of the negotiation that may occur in the class, we continue to hold on tightly to power through evaluation. Any other attempts to negotiate, rebalance, or collaborate are invalidated when the teacher controls the explicit success of the student, namely the grade. One teacher comments, "For many students [and teachers], passing the test has become much more important than what is learned."

Rhetoric of Evaluation

Baumlin and Baumlin (1989, p. 177) suggest three modes of classical rhetoric used by teachers: forensic, the rhetoric of accusation and defence; epideixes, the rhetoric of praise; and deliberative, the rhetoric of persuasion and change. Of the three, Baumlin and Baumlin

suggest, only the deliberative rhetoric looks toward the future to consider what the text could be. The other two forms consider only the past and the present, and view the text as something to be judged rather than to be reformed. Too often, however, even using the deliberative commentary, we simply tell the student what to do to improve her/his paper -- there really is no negotiation with the student, no attempt to leave the best and final choices of revision up to her/him. Perhaps, Baumlin and Baumlin suggest, we need to develop a new "rhetoric", one of collaboration and negotiation, "one that presents the critical judgments of a reader without assuming an authoritative voice, without undermining the student's own authority" (p. 180).

There is a need, then, to reexamine our teacher authority and power and to consider the students' needs for authorship and for creative control over their own discourse. We need to become more clearly aware of ideological differences between different teaching approaches "because the differences are not a matter of degree, but of differences in understandings about knowledge, teachers and learners, and the power relationships between them" (Crebbin, 1992, p. 10).

Our beliefs and assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning dictate our evaluative practices which in turn reinforce our beliefs. One of the purposes of evaluation, we believe, is to give feedback to our students, feedback in the nature of comments and grades that place or rank our students within the class and the larger educational community. In a ranking system we can have only a few winners. The rest, then (using the binary winner/loser) are not winners; they are losers. Our evaluative system in schools gives "feedback" for the purpose of supporting a grade. I say this because we rarely give comments on a piece of student writing that does not include a grade, therefore the comments are not deliberative, not intended to help the student further develop the piece of writing. Students receive written comments on their assignments in the nature of: "Good insights", "Good point", "Insufficient data", "You have not described the situation in detail", "Off topic", "Your grammar and

English is improving -- keep it up", and "A pleasure to read". We rarely give specific oral comments to our students about their assignments; to do so would be very time-consuming and would give no visible evidence of responding to our students' work.

We do not intend for our students to look at their grade, the comments that support the grade and say, "Oh, I'm a loser once again." We attempt to offer encouragement and suggestions that enable our students to develop further pieces of writing more capably. However, our evaluative system and jargon are derived from systems (legal, banking, organized sport) where there is a winner and, conversely, a loser. As students struggle to gain the top positions in school they are controlled by those who have the power to decide those positions. They are continually attempting to "measure up" to external standards and to please external judges, to the point where we have situations of students' "self-assessments" being graded by external evaluators (Alberta Education, 1996).

The comments we write on our students' texts tell them how to correct their writing ("when you finish your idea, put a period", "Check your spelling -- Britain, not Britian", reword this phrase 'pick up the money'"), tell them what is wrong (sometimes what is good) in their writing ("specifics required", "good ideas", "your ideas are clearer in this paper"), tell them which of their ideas are valuable ("good point", "good insight"). The comments and the grades tell students that, as well as teachers being concerned about helping students develop their writing, the teachers do have the answers. These comments keep students dependent on external evaluations to tell them about their work.

If indeed we are truly concerned with the development of independent thinkers and learners, we must rethink our evaluation systems. Our comments and marks on the pages of students' writing is oppressive, red marks violating the text, lines slashing out words, grades deciding the work's success. Students have no control over their work, or their development, when they must turn their work over to the

hands of others for "repairs." Giroux suggests that "schools do not provide opportunities in the broad Western humanist tradition for self and social improvement in the society at large" (1988, p. xxx), do not provide opportunities for independence and growth. The system of evaluation we employ in schools does not provide opportunities for teachers or for students to become independent learners and thinkers.

Teaching and learning must be linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with on-going relations of power in an attempt to describe an authentic relationship with the Other. Both teachers and students must attempt to find ways to become decentred from their roles as Subject and Object, as the teacher (subject) becomes teacher-student and the student (object) becomes student-teacher. Although structures of power will always exist, it may be possible through conscious awareness to renegotiate positions and structures (Freire in Filax, 1994, p. 11). It is necessary to find ways to include the active presence of students rather than merely their re-presentation, to free them from their role of "patient listening objects" (p. 12). Freire suggests a model of education in which both students and teachers are subjects, "not only in the task of unveiling reality and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of recreating that knowledge" (p. 12).

Rather than giving prescriptive assignments to students, teachers can think of ways to enable students to shape their writing to suit their own needs as well as the needs of the "curriculum". The following assignment given to a class of students suggests such a possibility:

> **You are emigrating to another country. This has been an ideal and a dream of yours for many years. Life will be wonderful; there will be no suffering and all will be comfortable.**
>
> **You have put all your money into this venture, and you assume that you'll be accepted into the country. You arrive and there's a red tape problem. You stay in the country for two weeks, while negotiations with immigration officials are conducted.**
>
> **You eventually are sent back to your original country because the new country will not admit you. Write about how you feel personally, about the country you were planning to emigrate to, and about returning to your original country.**

Use three paragraphs to answer the three questions in this assignment. Do not use essay format.

This assignment gave students the scope to examine issues from a personal perspective, but perhaps even this unnecessarily limited the students to a form and topic that may not have value for them personally. With a few changes the students could explore the issues of the text while at the same time investing personal quest-ioning into their writing.

Owning Our Experiences

The naming of personal experience is central to the liberatory pedagogy being suggested in this writing; both experience and naming or voicing of experience are situated and embodied. Voicing experience occurs in what Freire refers to as "a dialogic process of conscientization" (an informed commitment to action). He considers dialogue to be an existential necessity which in a pedagogical context can not be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor ... become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the participants in the dialogue (Freire in Filax, 1994, p.77). Freire further suggests that when the consciousness of the oppressed (student) is submerged, students are prevented from engaging in a process of inquiry about material conditions in which they are living their lives, about their age and position, their class or their gender. Levinas describes the authentic relationship between self and Other, claiming that it is discourse and more exactly response or responsibility which is the authentic relationship between the two (Levinas,1979, p. 95).

Even though schools are entrusted with preparing children for adulthood, often teachers themselves are treated as if incapable of making mature judgments (Simon in Gilligan,1993, p. 148). Both teachers and students are viewed as subordinate in the present model of evaluation, lacking control of the processes in which they must engage. The impact of their own prior experiences as student or as

teacher without voice is demonstrated in future dealings with others. The modelling of behaviours, beliefs, and teaching styles is a powerful method of learning, whether in a positive or a negative sense; there is often little in our experiences as teachers and as students to enable us to question assumptions dealing with the social impact of different teaching methods and with the total organization of our society, its values and its social assumptions. We perpetuate a system that is known and comfortable, rather than introducing uncertainty into our teaching.

When teachers and students take the time to plan and work together, learning can becomes more meaningful for the students and the teachers in the learning situation. The learning can become negotiated by those involved, not dictated by an authority who not only knows the questions but also how they should be answered. "Our starting point in education should be collaboration with those for whom evaluation has the greatest impact -- our students" (Lowe and Bintz, 1992, p. 20).

Often teachers see one of their goals in educating students as that of developing independent learners. If that is indeed a goal, we need to ask ourselves how we can enable students to recognize their own worth, how we can get to know our students well enough to enable genuine dialogue, how we can encourage their desires and their abilities to connect their personal interests with new learning. We also need to move beyond a notion of "knowledge" and "ideas" as the foundation of schooling. In English language arts, skills and experience obviously are important. Use and application (rather than recall) are behind many English language arts experiences, including several evaluation tasks cited already. Social studies includes participation and skills, science activities engage laboratory learning and social/ethical learning. We need to consider a process of evaluation that provides feedback to students without judging, i.e., how we can assume the role of "reader" of student texts rather than the role of "judge" or "critic". We need to recognize the person reflected in the writing and develop a sensitivity to the needs of the person in order to

avoid writing comments that make students feel bewildered, hurt, or angry. What is missing, suggest Spandel and Stiggins (1990) is the "sense of control that students gain from taking charge of their own work" (p. 111). Spandel and Stiggins offer two possible ways to enable students to gain this sense of power. One is to ensure that the process itself is not too structured or fraught with rules and times and attention to classroom management. Another is to give them the means, the skills, and the opportunity to assess their own writing according to the value system and criteria that the instructor and students generate together as an interpretative community.

All students and teachers have within them incalculable potential. The opportunities and experiences encountered throughout life shape future potential, enabling it to flourish or to lie dormant. Our educational experiences have a great impact on the ways in which we recognize our potential and are able to access this potential. Some of us exist under the domination of imposed power; others of us draw upon the power that lies within. The experiences we have known as students influence how we are able to live the rest of our lives. As teachers, then, we have the responsibility to understand power so that we can find ways to enable truly independent learners and thinkers.

8

Suspended between the Mixed (Mess)ages of Evaluation

g a(s)p s

Sitting at the staffroom table
sipping warmed coffee
having
nothing to say
not expecting to have anything to say
yawing silence engulfs the room
a teacher across the table
begins to talk
explaining a new system for
basketball drills
-self-assessment-
to whomever will listen

nothing to do
with me

someone else enters -- social
studies, I think
deflates herself into an available seat
across
pushes away remnants of
previous conversations
chats of this and that -- a new theory
for teaching political
systems
comparing
historical
precedents
how can we collaborate....?
"You mean to say, I think," I interrupt
"the patriarchal systems of western
politics and power."
... she pauses,
nods,
and soon moves away.

drama makes her entrance
exclaiming about the students'
performances
"brilliant, astounding ...
interpreting
their scripts
most creatively"
"Do you think," I ask
tentatively
"that
your idea would
work with poetry? ...
I've been searching for ways..."

we pause, considering
the potential

Recognizing Spaces

We often view gaps as unfilled spaces between two different viewpoints, between two known entities, between two opposing positions. Gaps serve to maintain distance, both physically and emotionally. We often do not recognize that gaps exist in our understanding of the world; instead, we assume that our world is complete, seamless, and coherent. We create binaries (control/independence; positive/negative; fear/desire; teacher/student; self/others; consistency/inconsistency) so that we may maintain order and coherence, and construct opposition within the binary through the use of a slash (Derrida,1976). The word or concept that is positioned on one side of the slash is in opposition to that on the other side of the slash. What, then, is represented by the slash? The slash represents the gaps that exist between the two established oppositions. By examining what may exist in the space between fundamental oppositions, we can tease out gaps in our own seeing and understanding.

As teachers we create binaries within our classrooms and within the school. Right/wrong, good/bad, strong/weak, important/trivial, male/female, black/white, subjective/objective. We construct an understanding of our world in school through these (and other) binaries, constructions that enable us to carry on with the complex work of education. We sometimes forget to examine the assumptions that surround our binary constructions, forget to examine the unmentioned represented in the slash. It is important to understand how both the voices (experiences) of the students and teachers, often forgotten in the in-between of binaries, have been subjected to "historical and cultural constraints" (McLaren,1992, p. 333) which help shape their identities.

Participants

The voices of five teachers and many of their students have struggled to be heard throughout this research project as I attempt to

re-present their words and experiences. The teacher voices represent five professional teachers with varied and rich backgrounds; their experience ranges from twelve to more than twenty-five years. Three of the teachers were, at the time of this project, involved in teaching English while the others were a social studies and biology teacher. The teachers had unique and individual teaching styles, and used their various strategies to provide successful learning experiences for their students. The strategies included lecture, self-directed study, group work, projects and presentations. Most of their teaching experiences were situated in high school situations. All of the teachers worked at the time in an urban high school whose students were drawn from a diversity of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, although there was a large proportion of students from working class backgrounds. The students represented themselves as polite and respectful of their teachers. They routinely held the door for others, smiled and greeted others, listened attentively in class. The voices of students are represented in this writing come from both "academic" and "non-academic" English, social studies, and biology classes. Although some of the students will be continuing their education at a university, many do not have those aspirations. They spoke rather more of the need for success in their studies in order to "pass the course, to graduate".

The teachers continually worked to develop their teaching practices, to incorporate new teaching strategies and to question the success of others. However, there are difficulties in reflecting in isolation, which is more often than not the case in teaching. One of the attempts of this project, enabling a researcher from outside of the school culture to work with these teachers, to talk about their practices and ideas both independently and collectively, was to devise ways for the teachers, students, and researcher to "interrupt" discursive practices that are difficult to understand in the daily course of our teaching lives. Ongoing conversations can open spaces or gaps through which we can examine our existing assumptions and practices, can provide ideas and directions for future learning to occur.

Identifying the Gaps

Gaps, however, often create feelings of discomfort, silent spaces that cannot be controlled. Those in power (e.g., government departments of education, teachers, administrators) attempt to fill the gaps in order to establish complete predictability and control. The existence of gaps suggests the possibility of multiplicity, of messiness. In an attempt to control our environments we want to smooth over the gaps in order to create a sense of order, to impose our vision of reliability and reality.

Freud, in his undelivered New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1932), writes of the importance "not to disguise problems and not to deny the existence of gaps and uncertainties" (in Freeman, 1995, p. 14). He continues,

> Not to deny the existence of gaps and uncertainties, but actively to seek them; this is a profound statement of the aims of pedagogy. For the gaps are precisely what no one can possess, and if (as conventional views of pedagogy would have us believe) knowledge is to be understood as a form of mastery, then the gaps cannot be known either. But psychoanalysis teaches us that there is a kind of knowledge that is not mastery, one that listens for the gaps and uncertainties and abides with them wherever and whenever it can. (p. 14)

It is within the gaps and uncertainties, the spaces we structure in our classrooms, that pedagogical moments occur.

I am attempting to provide a text that represents the voices of the individuals who have shaped this study in order for the gaps to present themselves visually and audibly. The teacher voices are not representative of consistent modes of thought or practice but shift in

distancing, openings and interruptions. The readers, too, will shift through this text and perhaps find themselves confronted with gaps of difference or openings. The meaning will emerge as voices join and separate. I have represented many teacher and student voices here that can be read polyphonically or individually, can connect vertically, horizantally, or diagonally. Connections can be made through the thematic fundamentals which have emerged (see figure 8-1), through the reader's own personal experiences, and through the comments I have included as an inside/outside researcher.

Figure 8-1 attempts to visually demonstrate the continual meeting/clashing of binaries lived by teachers. The privileged half of the binary is always more visible, attached to the external cylinder, while the not-privileged half remains unseen and hidden. While not as easily recognizable, the not-privileged component of the binary continues to impact upon and shape the seen half, influencing the entirety of the binary. As continual rotations cause interaction, the qualities of one binary change the qualities of another, i.e., "fear" influences not only "desire", but also "freedom", "practice", and the other not-privileged components; the quality of "other" influences "control", "theory", "teacher", as well as "self". The shape of the hollow cylinder, while being continuous and unbroken, allows gaps from the top and the bottom in which ideas may enter and leave. Hence the "fundamentals of evaluation" emerge from within the binaries of the two cylinder, weaving themselves in thematic ways to create understandings of evaluation.

The reader is invited to actively participate in researching meanings, to play at making meaning. The voices presented may be interpreted in different ways as different connections are made and shared. On some occasions the voices shift in the course of one conversation, across and through the gaps.

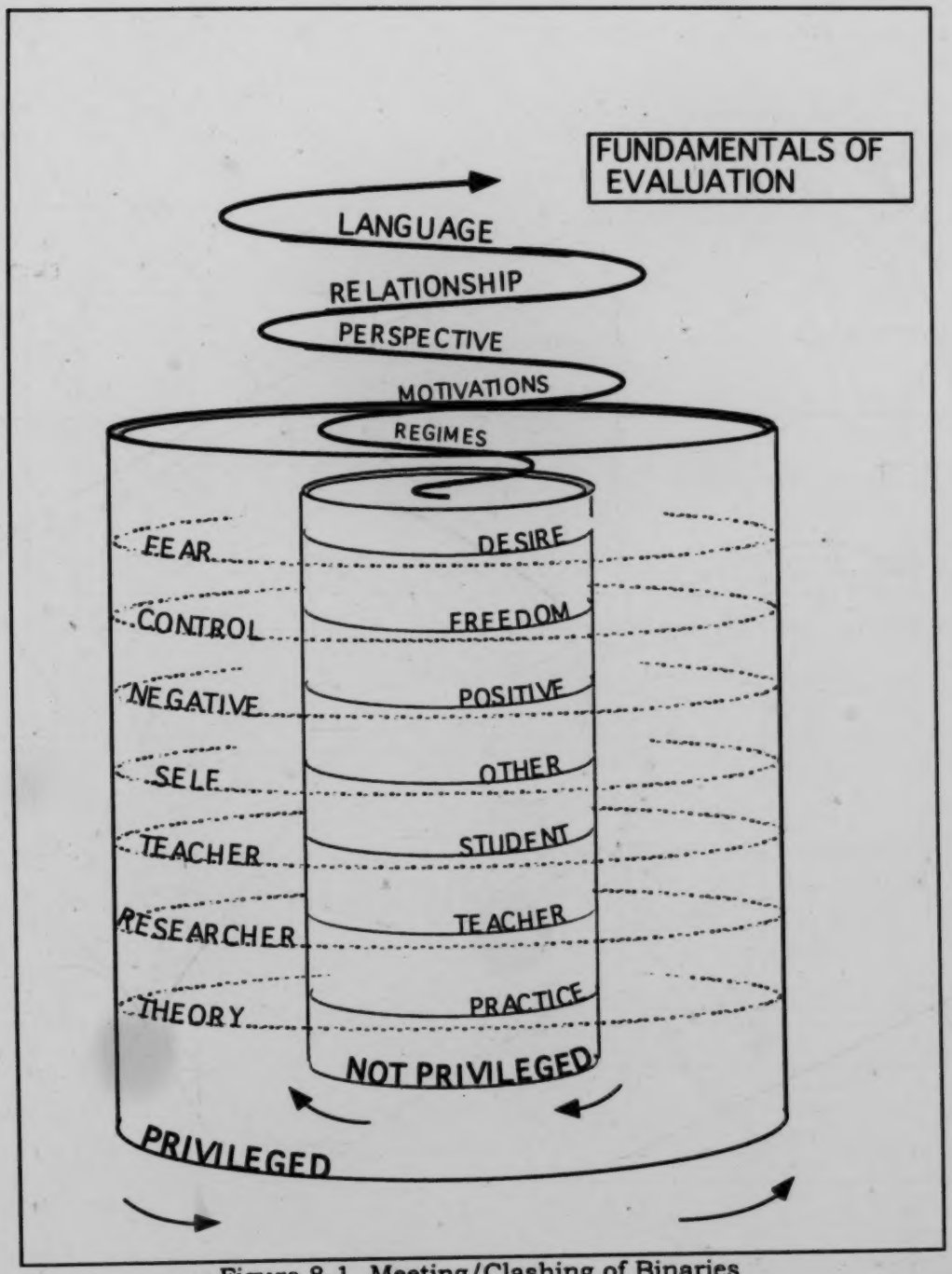


Figure 8-1 Meeting/Clashing of Binaries

(un)common understanding

Giving important instructions to the students, (how to determine metaphors in literary works, if I remember correctly) I turned and happened to glimpse two heads together whispering and overheard "meet you at the bus stop later"

I glare

she smirks
but
averts her eyes

a short time later leans over to her friend
whispers
giggles

I walk closer
whisper
terse words of my own

she again returns her eyes to the paper in front of her

I turn my back pretending all is back to normal that the rustling words behind me do not exist so as not to disrupt the smooth plastic surface of my classroom

Defining the "Gaps": Three Understandings

There are many understandings of the word "gap". I have selected three definitions. The first focuses on negative aspects of gaps, the distance between two bodies that cannot connect, cannot bridge the silence. The second definition suggests a way of understanding gaps that points out their usefulness, gaps that interrupt our seamless sense of the world and cause us to reflexively pause in our routines. It is the pause, the interruption, that gives possibilities for the third definition of the word "gap", extended spaces for openings that give places in which conversations might grow. The voices of teachers and students quoted in

the three sections offer elaboration for our understandings of gaps. The teacher and student voices are interspersed with observations or interpretive comments that I make as a researcher distanced from the immediacy of classroom life.

DISTANCING

Gap: a cleft; a chasm; a ravine between two mountains; a divergence or disparity; a musical rest (silence)

Teachers and students view each other from a great distance through a murky void, unable to focus or move closer.

A teacher says:

Marking has become an overwhelming burden. It takes so long. I see stacks and stacks of assignments that I need to mark piling up on my desk. I believe students should have lots of opportunities to write, but then I see students crumpling up papers, not caring about the comments....

A student says:

Why didn't you write all your comments down? Why didn't you tell us that you wanted a longer paragraph? You're paid to assess our work, to help us improve it, not to like it.... that's your job.

Researcher observes:

Relationships are stifled by lack of connection, lack of time, fear of failure, desire for trust with no way to attain it.

A teacher says:

Kids never question me on my essay marks; they should understand and ask me if there are any questions and in the next essay show how they implement what they said they were going to do.

A student says:

I trust the teacher, I think she knows how to write an essay. I try to give the teacher what she expects. I ask, "How can this be improved?" She gives suggestions or will give me a clue - how to put more detail into it.

Disparity in Relationships

Voice of privileged outside "other":

Radical critics have made salient the idea that the existence of a relationship existing between teacher and student is critical (Eisner, 1985, p.72), critical but limited, constrained by roles the teacher and student are forced to play.

A teacher says:

When I talk about an exam I talk about the opportunity to demonstrate to me what the students have learned. I put the onus back on them so they can show me what they know.

A student understands, saying:

What I write is an expression of me as a person, it's coming out of me. It is my "self" that is being evaluated.

Researcher comments:

Teachers and students strive to make connections with each other, unaware of different destinations and desires.

Guessing the Meaning in Gaps

"What do you want?" is the silent cry. "What do you value, so that I may value it too?" Teachers need to seek ways to articulate their own

values and beliefs, and to find approaches that enable students to do more than reproduce what the teacher values. What do you want? should be a question asked of students by their teachers. "How can the articulation of my values help you to formulate and understand your own?" We need to ask ourselves how we can refrain from keeping the "other" mute before the ideals of our own discourse (McLaren, 1992, p. 417), and before the ideals of societal discourses. The voices of teachers and students are often silenced "in order to remove any distractions" to society's demand for "more compliant, devoted, and efficient workforce" (McLaren, 1989, p. 1). Silence has its own power however, as do students. "Silence often has more force than many words and the eye more force than the mouth" (Miller, 1983, p. 38).

Researcher comment:

The teacher's perceptions are not directed to the student. The assumptions of common understandings silence us, remove possibilities of shared goals -- teachers couch their comments in slippery words, the meanings of which elude the students. The students do not have the words to ask and are left guessing.

One student's perception:

The teacher likes information, not too much introduction and conclusion. My marks are usually in the 60s -- I have no idea how to improve. He's a stern marker, and is hard on spelling mistakes. I put lots of information, but maybe I don't organize well enough.

A teacher's perception:

She is almost passing, and should really be in the lower class. She has shown no growth throughout the year. She can follow under strict guidance but has trouble on her own.

Researcher's comments:

The students and teachers desire to communicate with each other, but barriers of unarticulated assumptions, time, and lack of shared experiences often interfere with their desires.

The spoken:

... the message I thought I was sending or intending to send and the actual message I sent to students were not the same thing.

The unspoken:

...I set out to give assignments that students would all do well at... I just knew intuitively that I should do that, that it would help the students.

Teacher's realization:

They didn't know the criteria -- I was just flabergasted. They thought I was just pulling marks out of a hat.

Student comment:

Actually, I forgot about this [scoring criteria] you gave me. Still, your interpretation of a "competent response" -- we don't know what that means.

Teacher comment:

I expect that the students see the connection between the discussion and some of the assignments that we have had, and they don't...

Researcher comment:

...and they don't. The students couldn't see that a paragraph could be anything but the thing that they knew: five sentences, topic sentence, conclusion.

Teacher statement:

I learned a long time ago -- I thought I learned a long time ago to set criteria, so that's why I always establish what I'm looking for, but they didn't even hear it.

Researcher response:

But even though we establish criteria, even though we think it's coherent, the criteria does not always mean the same thing to students as it does to the teachers.

Researcher's comment:

The messages (spoken and unspoken) of the teacher imply even the student's inability to listen or to comprehend, let alone to create meaningful criteria with the teacher.

Divergent Knowing

How do we know students? -- through our beliefs and values, representations of our own experiences and ways of understanding the world.

"Rather than attempt to escape from their own ideologies and values, educators should confront them critically so as to understand how society has shaped them as individuals, what it is they believe,

and how to structure more positively the effects they have upon students and others" (Giroux, 1988, p. 9). We need to confront ourselves, understand ourselves, Giroux suggests, although he does not give any suggestions about how to begin this complex process. One teacher commented, "I've had assumptions about my students that were pretty sad. I believed that I had to make all of their decisions for them, until once they questioned my choices. I found out that they were articulate and could indeed make valid choices for themselves." What are some possibilities for understanding ourselves from the inside as well as the outside? How can our spiritual selves shape our understanding of teaching and our relationships with our students? One such possibility has been suggested by Haug (1987) as a process of working as a community of research subjects/objects to recognize the "necessity to come to our own terms with the social world and to make this, in turn, the object of theoretical discussion" (p. 45). It was Haug's process that we implemented as a community of teachers attempting to better understand our evaluative processes.

Evaluation that goes on in schools is connected to our emotions, to our selves. Fear, pain, and guilt are strong controlling forces, in opposition to joy, pleasure, and hope which are freeing forces. Regulation takes place through processes of surveillance and permits continuous, subtle and permanent watchfulness of our activities, perpetuating our sense of fear of being "caught out", guilt for not achieving all we could achieve. Recent investments in schools increase the levels of surveillance to which students and teachers are exposed. Schools are spending large quantities of money (equivalent to teachers' salaries) to install video cameras into the classrooms and hallways of the schools which may be viewed on a panel of TV screens in the principal's office. A school the size of a two-room schoolhouse recently was equipped with nine videocameras (Tilley, 1996). What might this equipment do to decrease our spontaneity and joyfulness in school? How might this affect the gaps that exist between teacher and student?

One teacher's reflection:

I find I don't give as much positive feedback as I think I should in terms of what a good introduction that was, or how well you used vocabulary.

If someone came in tomorrow and said "I'm going to evaluate you." I think it would concern us, we would view it negatively.

The evaluative technique is supposed to rank.....

Some of the negative aspects of evaluation are a function of the circumstances we find ourselves in, and there's nothing.... (voice fades out)

Another teacher comments:

I'd rather err on the side of generosity than negativity.

.... and we know there are many problems with that. Six people at one table arguing over how a government exam is graded ....there's a great deal of discrepancy.

Researcher comments:

We second-guess ourselves, attempting to justify practices that may not be understood or appreciated by external evaluators, rather than openly discussing our practices in order to find common ground.

"Positive comments are still no more productive in raising the level of performance, since marking written work is still uneven, idiosyncratic, and for the most part confined to proof-reading at a very superficial level" (Gannon, 1985, p. 14-15). The concept of writing

comments overall is problematic; the teacher is continually positioned as authority who is able to control the outcome of each student's attempt, of each evaluative experience.

Researcher observes:

There is no open space for the teacher to reflect on alternative experiences and new understandings with the students.

A teacher explains:

We're faced with 200 students every term, and then expected to give a comprehensive evaluation of every individual student -- based on the curriculum objectives -- I feel really frustrated with that, because I really do see so many wonderful things in my students, and I wish I could see every single thing, but in any given day, I can't and it becomes frustrating...

Teacher pauses and continues:

... it turns back on itself.

Researcher's comment:

Reality is subjective and shifts as we ourselves change and develop. Objective reality exists only for those who do not know the complexity of the individual context but who seek simplistic understandings of uniformity.

A teacher observes:

Outsiders always seem to question the judgments of teachers; teachers feel they are themselves being evaluated when they give government exams.

Other teachers comment:

For sure teachers are being evaluated.

I don't think so.

I think they do look and notice, but personally I don't care.

"The bias in one's observations and conclusions is a function of not only what is inadvertently put in, but what is inadvertently left out" (Eisner, 1985, p. 8).

Researcher's comment:

Unspoken and spoken contradictory assumptions are continually communicated to students about what is important to the teacher and to the system.

A teacher comments:

That which is not said is as important....

.... as that which is said.

A teacher observation:

The government exam really favours kids who write and read fast and who are first-draft successful whereas ....

.... one of the most important things in the English curriculum is to teach the writing process, to edit and to proofread, and to integrate reading and writing, speaking and listening.

Narrowing the Gap

We often ignore important questions, such as, Why are we doing what we're doing? Why is this knowledge being learned? Why is this type of pedagogical style being used to transmit information in the classroom? Why this form of evaluation?

A teacher explains:

Students from "good" socio-economic backgrounds, who have been reading since they were infants, will probably do better on these kinds of [government] tests than students with lower socio-economic backgrounds.

A student's comment:

It doesn't really matter if I do well, but I need the credits to get through high school.

Another student says:

I've got a baby already, so I'm not really planning on going on after high school.

The teacher further explains:

When exam results come back to schools, schools in lower economic areas tend to have lower results, yet it's reflected on the teachers in the school and their teaching methods rather than looking at students' backgrounds and all the factors that lead up to that final exam.

Researcher's observation:

The external evaluations do not regard difference -- cultural, gender -- as important considerations. Students come from diverse backgrounds that provide a richness of experience and

a multiplicity of voice. The gaps
between student and teacher experiences
are often too great to bridge.

We need a mode of dialogue and critique that unmasks the dominant school culture and that interrogates the assumptions and practices that inform the lived experiences of day-to-day schooling. Theoretical frameworks, whether conscious or note, operate as a set of filters through which people view information, select facts, study social reality, define problems, and eventually develop tentative solutions to those problems. It is theory that permits students, teachers, and other educators to see what they are seeing. Theory is responsible for creating and selecting facts and is crucial to almost every stage of thinking. Theory helps us order and select data and provides the conceptual tools by which to question the data. Theoretical frameworks and facts are inseparable parts of knowledge. Knowledge is not the end of thinking, but is the mediating link between students and teachers.

INTERRUPTING

Gap: a break in continuity; unfilled space; interruption

Interruptions cause us to pause, perhaps to feel discomfort. An interruption is like a thorn -- it can be overlooked initially, but eventually becomes irritating and needs attention.

Researcher's comment:
Our understandings of our work and
our selves can be jolted by new
realizations -- interruptions that
come through voices of others, and
opportunities to implement new ideas.

A teacher's observation:

I'm trying to get kids to get a sense of involvement in their own work. I've found that every time I've done group work it was just outstanding. I've been amazed by the quality of their work. They are very constructive in their criticism of their peers.

It's not a perfect system, it's not ideal, but I'm finding that I like it better than just ranking all the time.

Fundamentally it is not what students do that is inadequate; it is what they are not doing that is the problem.

Researcher's comment:

We need to resist the powerful controlling forces of judgements, made by voices of authority, that stifle our growth and vitality. Instead, we need to connect in ways that will enable us to open up to new possibilities and to take risks.

Teachers' comments:	Students' comments:
We are defined by negatives.	They look for all the things we're doing wrong.
They're fearful of evaluation. It strikes fear in their hearts.	The marks are sitting over our heads.
We point out that the student did very poorly, where he is weak, where to improve.	None of our efforts or improvements matter.
None of our marks matter.	
It can be devastating for the students. They feel frustrated and embarrassed at constantly being reminded of their flaws.	I get scared and set boundaries for myself.
I'm sometimes scared to give marks, because I don't know if I can justify them.	
I admit, I admit I made mistakes.	

<u>(in)Consistency</u>

The gap that enables teachers and students to admit to mistakes interrupts the previously held perceptions of student and teacher roles. Students and teachers need new and informed understandings of education and evaluative processes. We struggle to hear student voices and teacher voices, to find ways in which all voices are respected and honoured.

Researcher's observation:
Even though time is a valuable commodity

for teachers, they often find spaces to consider their practices.

A teacher comments:

We don't always practice what we preach -- some of the things I do aren't educationally sound.

A teacher comments:

Consistency is very important, more important than consideration of the individual student: I don't boost the marks because of the effect from the government exam. I don't know what is right -- it's a real cause for stress and it's a moral question.

It's very important to be consistent, and the scoring guides from the government exams help.

The dictionary definition of "consistent" reads as follows: free from contradiction; fixed or steady; agreeing together. I wonder why consistency is a goal we want to strive for in educational evaluation? How can we reconsider the value placed on consistency in classrooms and find more spaces for individual voices? The system as a meritocracy provides the claim to equity through consistently treating everyone on an equal basis.

A student says:

I get 70s and 80s on my assignments -- it varies. I go and see the teacher, and then he helps me structure the essay form. To do better, I need to stick to one topic, to make a decision and stick with it to help organize it. The work ethic is really good in this class -- he knows how to control the class. I enjoy the class.

Another student comments:

I like this class because the teacher lets us express our opinions.

A teacher comments:

This student does her own thing. I admire her, but she drives me crazy. She's got a strong quest for knowledge -- she doesnt fit in class, but adapts to suit herself. She's frustrating for me, but I can also see her strengths.

Researcher comments:

Teachers value individualism, yet only as it conforms to the system. We cannot afford to encourage too much individualization because of the need to conform to system-wide evaluation.

Students, however, when given opportunities, prove themselves to be thoughtful and capable. The workings of the evaluation "system" can be shared with them to create greater understanding. Students value opportunities to explore ideas and demonstrate their capabilities, to grow and develop, and to share the understanding of constraints that face their teachers.

Out in the Open

A teacher's belief:

Marks shouldn't be secret, because I think that the secrecy makes for a desire to know more. If everything is out in the open, not just the marks but the process of marking, and if students are involved in marking, then it's less threatening. I do a lot of group work now, cooperative work, because a lot of what goes on in the real community is group projects.

Researcher's observation:

Only when students have the vocabulary and can articulate their thoughts do they cause teachers to stop and re-examine.

Researcher's question:

Teachers do not feel that they have to justify their grading and ranking processes. Why, then, do they feel compelled to justify their alternative forms of assessment such as self and peer evaluation, and portfolios?

A student comments:

I thought I should have got more marks on "thought and detail". The teacher's comments didn't talk about thought and detail but only about writing skills.

A teacher's comment:	Researcher comment:
I asked the class how they would like their in-class essay marked, and they said, "We don't want you to mark it, we want you to conference us." In conferencing we negotiated the marking as well, but they requested the conference because they feel that helps them get more than just marks and comments.	Students are viewed as objects to be "conferenced." Students' voices are not heard in this "negotiation" process. "You" (the teacher) holds the power, and the negotiation is student acquiescence.

We need to understand schools as sites that, while basically reproducing the dominant society, also contain possibilities for educating students to become active, critical citizens. For teachers this means examining their own "cultural capital" (Giroux, p. 7) and examining the way in which it either benefits or victimizes students.

A student's comment:

I expected a better mark because I thought I had included everything that the teacher asked for.

A teacher's practice:

I usually break down the marks, and tell the students where they rank on each individual assignment. I write it on the board, in groupings (30/35, 25-29/35, etc.). They always remind me to tell them where they rank, so they obviously want to know. They want to know where they ranked in the class, whether it was an easy or tough exam, was it average, did it discriminate, did some students get 34/35, did some students fail?

If your class average was below 50%, wouldn't you question....

Student:

The teacher gives the meaning of the poems; he knows the meaning of the poems.

Second teacher's response:

That never comes up in my class, for bad or good, I don't know. All I can say is that I never rank, I don't even care myself. I never look to see what the scores are, I don't care what my class average works out to be.

Second teacher interrupts:

It never is.

Researcher's comment:

Power can be wielded as a tool for silencing or shared to enable growth and communication. Conversations between teachers and students create interruptions in the shield of power.

Researcher's comment:

We need to use gaps to pry open the meanings we might share.

One assignment given by a teacher: you are emigrating to another country. This has been an ideal and a dream; life will be paradise and there will be no suffering. You've put all your money into this venture, and you assume you'll be accepted into the country. You arrive and there's a problem, and eventually you are sent back to your original country. Write about how you feel personally.

Student interpretation:

We have to write a story on how we'd feel moving to another country and all the setbacks that come about. We have to know what the teacher is asking, to write the story, to use how the teacher's taught us to write, in correct order, paragraphs and stuff, grammar, spelling, correct form. This helps you with something new, understanding a situation similar to that; I get to write about my feelings.

Researcher's comment:

Students respond positively and enthusiastically to opportunities for self-expression, ways in which they can make meanings for themselves and develop a sense of self-satisfaction about their learning.

Glimpsing Within

A teacher's reflection:

If we can get students to look within themselves and then look at the ranking within, instead of without, if we look at what we can do today and tomorrow we can do something better, then we're going to be happier with who we are as persons. So maybe as educators we can't take away the ranking (I don't think you can take away some form of it) but I think there's a positive way to do it so that we're not being bitter or proud, but it's satisfaction instead.

Another teacher responds:

If only we could see the big picture ourselves, so that if we don't do very well at some things we do well at others -- it balances out.

One teacher is reminded of a story that happened a few years ago. "Another teacher, the science teacher, and I gave a common assignment. One student was concerned that he was going to have to do this assignment jointly with English because he had never done very well in English. However, he did the assignment really well. The other teacher and I worked really hard to help the student develop his strengths and in the final analysis the student achieved an 80%. All the things he had been missing in his English work showed up because the topic was in an area he knew really well, so he did improve his mark. What happened then was that his mark in English also improved because all of a sudden he realized that he was able to achieve in both subject areas."

Researcher's comment:

Throughout the education system we continually impose labels on students, and in turn they impose the labels on themselves.

There is a considerable seduction of power as we evaluate our students' work. Less time and energy is needed when we act in the role of judge (Greene, 1995). We need not concern ourselves with conversation or negotiation, both which take considerably more time than an imposed judgment. As the holder of power, is it possible to read a student's work without making judgments, without expecting particular answers?

Researcher observes:

> We can use evaluation methods to perpetuate a patriarchal system of power imposed from above, or to enable students to see future possibilities.

A teacher's realization:

> I've tried to work with my kids this year in honouring their ideas, their different points of view, but I know I'm biased, and I have my own perspective, my own hidden agendas that I'm not necessarily always aware of, or up front about.
>
> In some ways it frightens me that I have that much power, but the bottom line is that at some point I have to assign a grade and get on with it.

A student comments:

> We need to use how the teacher taught us to write -- in correct order, paragraphs, and stuff ....

A second teacher says:

> The way I handle it is that I have questions rather than marks -- have you thought of this, or what do you mean by this? I respond as a reader, e.g., I don't understand what you have said here. I'm not saying that they as a writer haven't done it correctly, I'm just saying that I as a reader don't understand it.

Resisting the Seduction of Power

There is a considerable seduction of power as we evaluate our students' work. Less time and energy is needed when we act in the role of judge. We need not concern ourselves with conversation or negotiation, both which take considerably more time than an imposed judgment. As the holder of power, is it possible to read a student's work without making judgments, without expecting particular answers?

Researcher observes:

We can use evaluation methods to perpetuate a patriarchal system of power imposed from above, or to enable students to see future possibilities.

Researcher's question:

Do you think students are able to learn from our evaluative processes? Are they learning how to do things better or are they just learning where they fit in the ranking kind of thing?

A teacher's response:

That depends on the students' ownership and commitment to the course.

I make suggestions on a paper and in the next paper that the student submits I can see there's been real effort and real work, and I can see the struggle going on. At that point I say, "I can see you trying to do this, so why don't you try this different approach?"

Researcher comments:

Our position as "teachers" and as "authority" gives weight to our words. Students are committed to finding out "what teachers want" and automatically value suggestions, even passing comments, made by the teacher.

A teacher comments to a student:

Let me make some general comments in terms of content -- what did I expect, what should you have included to get good marks. It's not just a matter of listing, but you had to show how the facts tied into the issue.

What was your position? Everything you wrote had to tie into the topic sentence. I marked grammar by correcting the first two paragraphs.

Your essays were marked holistically, but if spelling was very poor, I took a few marks off.

The student says to the researcher:

Now I realize the teacher doesn't want basically facts, but to tell how things are affected by it, to "expand". How would I do that? What would I expand?

I did better than I usually do. I went to see the teacher for help to stay on topic, and with sentence structure and writing paragraphs. He told me not to start out, "In this essay I will..." I used to do it but now I don't because he told me not to.

I need to improve my spelling and grammar to do better. I need to be more specific -- I was too general.

Please See Me....

Gaps between the teacher's intent and the students' interpretation of comments "please see me" exists within a gap. In one instance it opens up possibilities for conversation and in the other it indicates errors in the students' work. Is it ever possible to request a

student to "see me" in order to indicate the student's success or to initiate conversations purely out of interest? The red pen scrawled "please see me" creates a space for interaction between the teacher and individual students, but most often gives further opportunity for the teacher to elaborate on the student's errors and to help him/her "improve".

Researcher comments:

Through relationship trust between teacher and student is developed, and an understanding and comfort that comes with familiarity and understanding.

A teacher says:

I asked my students to write personal responses to ten poems. It takes a lot of courage and trust to put these things down on paper -- they come from the heart. I don't know if I'll mark them. I tell them I'm going to mark them, but never have.

A student says:

I trust the teacher; she knows the meanings of the poems. I try to give the teacher what she expects.

I was happy that the personal responses weren't marked, but I think I would have put as much effort into it -- I enjoyed it. I learned that poetry isn't as easy as people think it is.

Researcher comments:

An interruption is created as the teacher struggles between the system's demands to mark assignments, and the heart's urging not to. The students' responses legitimate the results from this interruption.

Researcher observes:

A teacher's absence of the day before caused further stress because there was a loss of continuity. The teacher had to "catch up" on what she had missed the day before, locate materials, and in some cases return to work that was to have been finished the day before.

"Can we work in partners?" queried a student. "No!" was the teacher's immediate response. "I just want you to sit and work quietly -- no talking!" After a couple of minutes of quiet and calm, the students working independently, the teacher explained, "Sometimes you copy answers and it's not a very good learning experience."

Researcher's comment:

In the gap created through the pause in the dialogue, the teacher finds a "why", a reason for individual work and the student learns from the teacher's (in)visible marks.

A teacher comments:

Rather than making "x"s and marks all over, I use pencil, so that red doesn't stand out in their eyes, because pencil kind of fades. They can see it, but it doesn't look like a paper that has all kinds of marks on it. Just gradually they change what they're doing.

And continues:

At the end of three months I asked a student to look back on her previous work. She took it out and I asked her, "Do you see a difference, and she said, "oh". She didn't even know she'd made that transition just by doing it.

OPENINGS

Gap: an opening; a passage; a broken place

In openings created through conversation and reflexive thinking there is space for new growth, new questions, new understandings. Teaching and learning are dialogic in character, and dialogic action depends on awareness of oneself as knower. We come to know through conversation. As Lowe and Bintz (1992) say, "the basis of evaluation is conversation, and without conversation, evaluation of any sort is of little significance" (p. 18). Through conversation we discover the complexities of each other and can extend our awareness of "self" to

include an awareness of "other". Our world becomes more complex and it becomes richer.

Through language we are able to create passages between the known "self" and the unknown "other", passages which both protect the privateness of "self" and expose "other" to public scrutiny. In conversation, "I" speaks not to "he/she" as "other" but to a "you" that can slide along a continuum between "self" and "other", connecting the subject of self to the object of other. The connection between self and other makes the private public while at the same time making the public private. The use of the indexical sliding pronoun "you" exposes thoughts from self or "I" and connects those thoughts to the other that has been suggested by "you" ("you" having been transposed in conversation from "she/he" and from "I"). As in the following question, "you" refers to the teacher herself, "I".

The teacher's question:

How do you know if you're measuring the things you are intending to measure, realistically? It's kind of guesswork.

I wonder if that's very valid.

The teacher's response:

You have to get students in your classes who you use as benchmarks for the rest of the class and you can see how they perceived the assignment and how well they did on the assignment.

Researcher comment:

The teacher protects "self" while at the same time probing issues that are personal. Use of "you" opens "self" from an individualistic to a multiple perspective of self.

Researcher's comment:

Spaces offered by the teacher must be held open while the student adjusts to new possibilities.

Re-viewing Words, Re-searching Meanings

A teacher says:

Think of this piece of writing as a philosophical game. Play around with it. Dialogue your thoughts back to me in a creative manner.

Then you want to bring it up to me to ask if it's right. Instead, have two of your peers read through your work and give feedback.

A student says:

Will you just read this over and tell me if it's what you want. Is it long enough? What else should I say?

Researcher's comment:

Students begin to explore multiple meanings and interpretations, questioning authority that had previously been taken for granted and left to the teacher.

A researcher observes:

The students are reading a newspaper clipping of Vimy Ridge, written in 1992. There is discussion over how many Canadians there were at Vimy.

The teachers suggests that the students check with another source to compare the information, encourages them to use different reference materials to check information.

A student's questions:

This text has a different number than the newspaper article. Which one is right?

Why are they different?

Researcher comments:

Students are also able to open gaps for teachers. Conversations between teachers and students not only offer possibilities for students, but also for teachers.

Researcher queries:

Why do you choose to teach in the way you do? How do you select the pieces of literature that you use in your classes?

A teacher responds:

I had a student a few years ago, one who did very well in English. She pointed out to me that I was using literature to try to teach them about life. My God, I thought to myself, that's what I've been trying to do....

When we can manipulate the images we have encountered in our mind's eye to explore and play with alternatives that cannot be encountered in the empirical world, we are called imaginative. "The outer eye gives us the world, the inner eye gives us possibilities to pursue" (Eisner, 1985, p. 8). For educational evaluation this means the form of the qualities we use: the particular words we select, the sentences we construct, the cadence, tempo, tone, and tenor of our language is a primary means for conveying what our (hopefully) refined sensibilities have revealed to us.

Researcher's comment:

We enable students to reciprocate trust, to use evaluation for learning.

A teacher's discovery:

I gave an assignment to one class, and they grumbled and went and did it. Then I gave the assignment to the second class, and they are a very verbal class. They asked me lots and lots of questions and as they asked, the assignment came clear in my head. Now I was really clear about what the assignment involved, and this class understood because I asked them to give me feedback about the nature of the assignment. Then I thought, oh, the poor other class, they've already set to work and now I'm really clear, they're going to hand me in something and I'm going to mark it with a clear head and they're not going to meet the criteria I've developed, because I wasn't as clear with them. Then I actually went back to them and told them exactly that. I said, "Look, this is part of the process of teaching." It was a tough thing to admit, but I told them I could give the assignment back and they could look at their work one more time.

Teacher perception of students' response:

I thought they'd be really mad at me, but they weren't. They were actually very forgiving and said "thank you."

Every time I admit that I made a mistake they seem to be more appreciative.

<u>Opening Up</u>

How do we come to know our students? How do we come to know ourselves? Our "selves" are further revealed to us as we gain understandings of our students.

Researcher's question:

How do we come to know our students? We need to rethink our classroom practices in order to make valuable use of our time.

A teacher's comment:

I wonder what happens to time at high school. Teachers in elementary schools can have their students writing six or eight drafts of a story, even at grade one, and they're not marking every one of them, and they have their students do peer editing, but ....

.... then when they come to high school there's nobody doing this. We don't have enough time.

Researcher's comment:

We must continually search for ways to make time for the conversations that create the passages of understanding between teachers and students. We must value the gaps that lead us to wonder, to make connections, to discover.

A teacher comments:

If I had my choice I would not evaluate students whatsoever. I try to ask myself, what have they learned that they appreciated or valued, that they'll take with them for the rest of their lives.... .... like a real appreciation for Joseph Conrad that they didn't have before they came to my class, or maybe they all of a sudden get an interest in feminist literature and they never had that before....

We're so caught up in numbers and yet we need to consider what, in ten or twenty years from now, what really did the students value and really get out of their education in high school beyond good scores on formal tests?

Students have many talents and abilities not recognized in the classroom, not valued by the system. A grade eleven student wrote the following poem at home, separate from any school assignment. As I questioned her about her work and her success in class, she responded negatively but then visibly brightened as she pulled a folded-up piece of paper from her back pocket and said, "But I do like to write poems." Her love of writing and of poetry, although sentimental and rough, brightened her face. However, they only come to view in chance conversations.

<u>Dreams</u>

All I do is dream of you

Dream is all I do
But when I wake and you're not mine
My world stops, and I'm blue

When I sleep and dream of you
My heart soars high through the air
But when I wake and see what's real
My heart falls, and you're not there

You know you make me dream of you
With your looks and voice and touch
And then I wake with you in my head
And I realize I love you, maybe too much

I want to stop dreaming of you
And make all these feelings leave
I'm tired of you always being a fantasy
I want you to be here, with me.

All I do is dream of you
Dream is all I do
But the day I wake and you're by my side
Will be when all my dreams come true.

AW (grade eleven student)
May 1995

(permission to reprint in this text has been secured)

The student who wrote this poem was friendly and happy to hold a conversation. However, she did not invest a great deal of time in her school assignments and received only adequate grades on her assignments. What, then, prompts a student to write her own poetry, to pursue her own writing? Perhaps students should be given opportunities to be heard and to know that what they have to contribute will be valued and respected. When they are given these opportunities they are themselves able to consider what they know, to identify what they need to know, and to self-evaluate (Lowe and Bintz, 1992).

Exploring New Passages

Annie Dillard (1974) encourages us to "stalk the gaps" (in Freeman, 1995, p. 269). She writes:

> Ezekiel excoriates false prophets as those who have not gone up into the gaps. The gaps are the thing. The gaps are the spirit's own home, the altitudes and latitudes so dazzlingly spare and clean that the spirit can discover itself for the first time like a once-blinded man unbound. The gaps are the cliffs in the rock where you cower to see the back parts of God; they are the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the icy narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery. Go up into the gaps. If you can find them; they shift and vanish too. Stalk the gaps. Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock -- more than a maple -- a universe. p.268-69

Education should aim to improve everyone's life chances by promoting fairness and equal consideration for all groups in the community, rather than training people to accept control, conformity, and competition (Bates,1983; Freire,1977 in Crebbin,1992). The roles of teachers and learners are therefore active; they all share in the learning, and in setting broad goals which all students will attain. To evaluate such learning requires a whole range of multi-dimensional measures, along with individual monitoring of students' learning experiences and their ongoing development of cognitive, creative, and social competencies. Teachers need to become aware of the ideological differences between the different teaching approaches because the differences are not a matter of degree but differences in understanding about knowledge, teachers and learners, and the power relations between them. A model of evaluation formulated outside learning situations cannot answer the kinds of questions that "insiders" (i.e., teachers and students, those closest to learning) are asking. We have for the most part directed our attention towards developing more complex and sophisticated *methods* of evaluation, instead of interrogating and refining the *methodology* that drives these methods.

(Lowe and Bintz, 1992). It is not methods, per se, that enable teachers to assess student growth. It is their understanding of and reflection on the theoretical assumptions about knowledge, learning, literacy, teaching, and curriculum that underlie classroom practice.

9

Informed by the Mixed (Mess)ages of Evaluation

Re-Positioning:
Re-searching from the Inside Out

High up in the first balcony
pen poised paused to compose
a critique
of unfolding performance
readying myself to (dis)approve
of scenes played out
before me

I gathered
(for my critique)
background
data
on each player
no matter how insignificant
the role

in the midst of an interview
with a lead actor
I chanced
to glance
aside in a mirror
reflecting back
at me
was a face of judgment
frowns creased across
the forehead and eyes
shaping a look
across a cold distance

I look again as he she you
acted me
I acted out
my inner role

reflecting warmth
empathy I smiled

in eager conversation
of shared idea

glancing at the first balcony
fleeting thoughts of
feared judgments recorded
on the small notepad

before returning to rehearsal
knowing the nuances that
would not be seen by
an outside eye
the melodious voices that would not be heard
the heartbeat leaps that would not be felt by an
outside observer

as we perform together

Re-shaping My Understandings: A New Context

As I completed my research project, working with a group of five teachers in a high school, I realized that the project needed a further phase, one in which I could re-develop and re-focus the questions and understandings that had developed through my work with these teachers. I have formulated the research questions that have shaped this writing within my learning situations -- in the classrooms I inhabited for fifteen years, immersed in spaces with textbooks and paper and desks and students, and in classrooms innabited by other teachers and other students. My questions and my present teaching practices have emerged from a teeming mass of memories, intuitive senses, emotions, thoughts, dictates, directives, and chance encounters, fermenting unarticulated over the years as I acted the multiple roles I was assigned as teacher and observed other teachers acting in these roles. It is the gaps that exist in the in-between of the years of teaching practices to which I have turned my attention.

As a teacher, I could feel my understandings taking shape, but there were aspects of my interactions with students that did not feel "right". I have always struggled with the evaluative aspects of "teaching". My research questions have been continually emerging, but I have not always been able to see their shape forming clearly. I myself have been part of the mass that swirled and seethed. I had to extricate myself from the mass in order to understand the evolution of my questions, to articulate the questions that began to shape many years previously, before I could take my questions back to teaching situations. My detachment from the mass that grew in my classroom was not through design, however, but more through a series of events that began to give shape to my teaching experiences. I was not able to see the situation clearly enough to be able to know I needed to "escape". Looking back, I can now locate shapes and connections that stand apart from the rest of the mass; at the time, all was murky and

undistinguishable. I was caught in the mass of classroom experiences that was my reality.

It was vital to my articulated understanding of classroom life and the pressures put on that life by evaluative demands to become distanced from the classroom, in order for my questions to have taken on a recognizable and distinct form. The questions that took form were: What is the influence and impact on students of their teachers' written responses to their writing? How can we as teachers come to better understand our purposes, both implicit and explicit, in writing particular comments on our students' work, and the influence that our comments have on our students' future development of skills and attitudes? How can we develop evaluative practices that best enable us to guide our students to clearer understandings about reading, writing, and learning?

Shifting Perspectives

The time I spent as an "outside" researcher in other classrooms enabled different questions to emerge that began to give shape to my own teaching experiences. Like a hot-air balloonist, I became lighter and lighter as I threw sandbags over the side. My view became more distanced and gave more scope to my questions. Not being attached to classrooms by ties of emotion or responsibility, my views became more "objective". The people and situations I was viewing became more object-like and detached from my personal reality.

My freedom from responsibility and emotional ties in a particular classroom enabled me to move from classroom to classroom, understanding situations relationally as well as specifically. I spent several months in a city high school observing classes, talking to teachers and to students, relating my observations back to the teacher participants, reading, and thinking reflexively , attempting to actively examine my developing thoughts. I came to understand events and situations differently from the students and teachers who were immersed in the classrooms. I was able to make connections between

classrooms and understand influences upon situations that were more readily visible from my vantage point.

The distance I was able to achieve through this research experience enabled me to see a variety of perspectives that related to my questions, that gave new meaning to my questions. I was able to get a sense of the landscape "very small" (Greene, 1995, p. 10), to see many things but from a distance. The distance allowed for a sense of detachment from the realities of day-to-day classroom existence, a distance that is not often obtainable in the confined space and culture of classroom life. However, this distance enabled articulated questions to emerge in a form that was recognizable to me. By creating a focus through my initial research questions, observations and conversationsthat enabled me to think reflexively, new vistas and questions began to open.

Connecting Past to Future; Connecting "They" to "Me"

As I myself became immersed in the culture of the classrooms I was observing, the public classroom performances I had understood through observation, conversation, and questions in group meetings began to connect with the private understandings (through reflection, memory, story) of classrooms that I held. The questions that began to present themselves to me related not only to past and present experiences, but directed me to look ahead to future experiences. The assumptions I had taken to my classrooms, and to my researching experiences, were brought to light for examination. The third person "she/he" positioning of the participants of my research (see figure 9-1) began to blur with the first
person "I" positioning I held for myself. The distinctions between positions shifted through conversations, and as the elusive signifier "you" took on more meanings and encompassed more positions, I was less able to distinguish a unique and separate position for myself. The signifier "you" positioned in figure 9-1 slides along the continuum between past and future, and as easily slides between private and public, creating interruptions to previously assumed understandings.

Its referent shifts at the caprice of the speaker, at the whim of the listener.

After a time my vantage point from high and far began to feel uncomfortable. My own classroom action had been paralyzed and I looked for ways to return my hot-air balloon to earth in order to bring

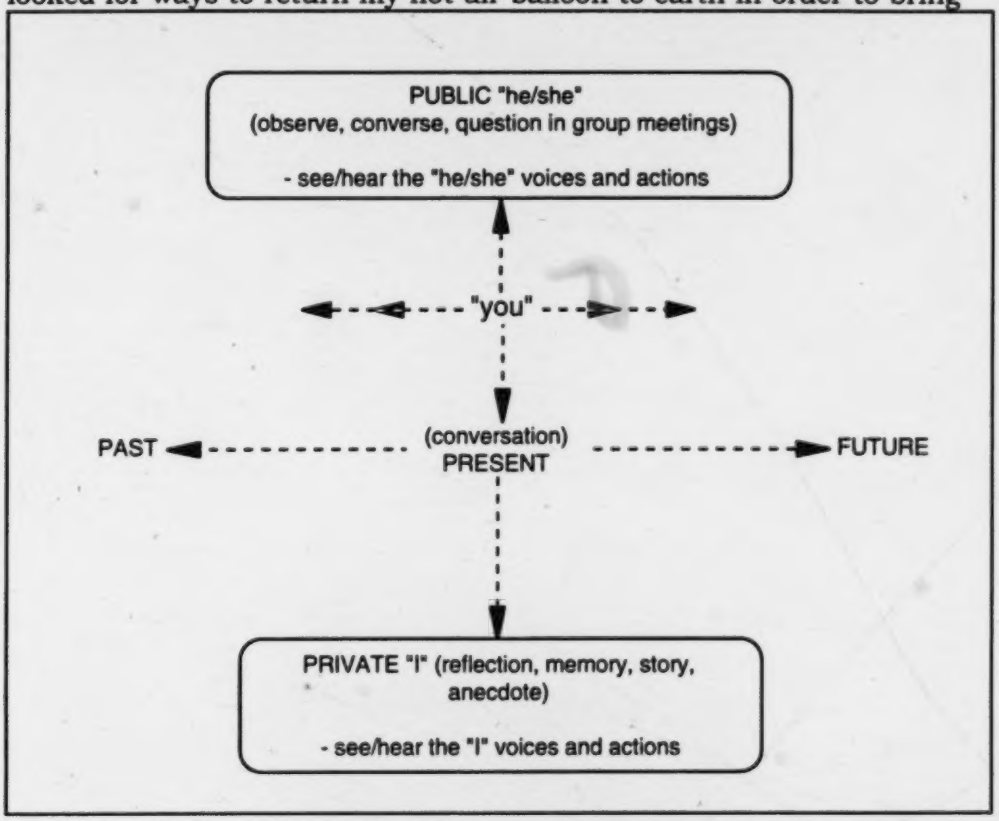


Figure 9-1 Public and Private

my new thoughts to classroom life. I returned to earth with many questions, questions that opened up gaps in which I could explore new possibilities: How can I change my evaluative practices to better relate to the other activities that develop in a classroom? How can a language develop for myself and my students that will create gaps in which understanding will grow? These questions have moved me to consider the words, methods, and beliefs that created the structure of my teaching. The resonances of student and teacher voices have made

connections between the observations I made of other teachers' practices to my own previous practices, and have created possible connections to future practices. I have continued to hear the voices of students and teachers as I have considered new directions, asked questions, made comments and observations from their own perspectives. I have become more aware of future possibilities as I have become more able to distinguish and hear distinct voices. I have become more aware of multiple perspectives that exist in a classroom and in a school culture. At the same time I have become more certain and less certain of future directions, and welcoming of suggestions from the others that create our educational community. My foray into a more distanced space gave me increased comfort with my continued search for alternatives, and has made me more welcoming of collaboration.

Re-positioning

I have returned to the classroom to teach junior high students, "seeing big" (Greene, 1995, p. 10), aware of the details of personality, of curriculum, of individual desires. My questions have become more specific to the context in which I now locate myself, my search for alternative evaluative and teaching strategies more focused. I have challenged myself with questions: "Of what significance is your year of research? What have you learned that will change your teaching/evaluating practices? How will you go about creating changes?" I have seen some of the effects of imposed external evaluations on students, on teachers, and on learning. How can evaluation be used to support and extend learning, rather than to limit and stifle it? How can alternative practices of education/evaluation (radical pedagogies) be discussed and considered differently? How can we then change teaching practices as well as vocabularies of pedagogy?

Is it possible to seriously challenge the banking model of education as described and critiqued by Freire (1968)? I have had cause to closely examine my own teaching practices as well as the practices

of the teacher participants in my research study and have used Freire's model as a guide in my examination. Freire has suggested that the dominant approaches to education include the following:

a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught
b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about
d) the teacher talks and the students listen -- meekly
e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined
f) the teacher chooses and enforces his [sic] choice, and the students comply
g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher
h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it
i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students
j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are the mere objects. (p. 59)

I have considered each of these items of Freire's critique, and recognize them in both my own teaching and the teaching of those teachers I have observed. I recognize myself, and other teachers, in this critique -- not every item, and certainly not all the time, but perhaps still too often. I recognize particularly a way of thinking about students, believing that they needed to be guided and shaped by my wisdom and background knowledge. The students (they) become the public property of a system that objectifies the students and their knowledge. I recall crafting lessons in which I was the leading actor, director, and set designer; the students were relegated to very minor dramatic roles and to the role of audience. I have observed many classes where the course content was selected solely by the teachers who reasoned that this material was necessary for the final exam. Students have had no choice but to comply with the teacher because the alternative is failure -- of the assignment, the exam, or the course. The relationship between student and teacher as described by Freire's

"banking education" is one of oppression, fear, and complacency, enforced through evaluative means. The evaluative means consider not the future of students' learning, but rather judge the students' learning based on past performances. Teachers, in the students' understanding, hold the power, make the rules, and dictate the course of study. The teachers' understanding, however, encompasses the belief that the power is held by a higher authority yet, and the teachers are merely implementing curriculum and discipline policies that have been dictated to them. The responsibility for education, therefore, does not rest with the students, nor with the teachers, but with a higher unnamed, unrecognizable authority.

Challenging Ongoing Practices

Dominant ideologies, such as the banking model suggested by Freire, have structured education and created expectations that need to be challenged in our schools and in our classrooms. Teachers need to consider the spirituality of teaching, the life-long effects of educational/evaluative practices in school. How can education develop and improve the lives of students and of teachers? How can we create openings in which students can grow and develop? Who will decide how that development will happen, and what the improvements will be?

I have taken these thoughts and questions with me into the classroom as I resumed teaching junior high school, becoming a researcher from the inside. With memories and suggestions of educational practices scrolling through my mind, I have attempted to make changes to my own practices. Assisted by knowledge of the particular classroom situation and the students that would share my space for a year, I returned to the questions "How can evaluation be used to support and extend learning?" and "How can alternative practices be considered differently for both teacher and students?" I have seen the terminology of educational practices change (e.g., end of chapter questions have become extensions of learning; good copy has become final draft; binder has become portfolio), seen different configurations of desks and students (e.g., rows have become circles or

clusters), seen materials adapt to modern times (e.g., young adult novels; CDRoms; multiple texts), but the underlying belief structures that plot an educational course have remained fixed and unconsidered. How can underlying understandings of education and evaluation be reconsidered as well as with the language used to describe events and activities?

Examining My Own Assumptions

If there are to be changes to beliefs and power structures in my classroom, there must be significant changes to the understandings both my students and I bring to educational and evaluative situations. I realized that I needed to examine the assumptions I brought to my teaching before I could reshape the nature of education with my students. "With my students" became an important phrase that anchored my thinking. I considered the aspects of education that I valued -- expression of voice, existence of choice, opportunities for conversation, flexibility, unpredictability (through unrehearsed and spontaneous dialogue), and student "author"ity. I did not want to see my students shaping and manipulating their writing (and manipulating me) for good grades. I did not want choice to be artificial, controlled by the teacher. I wanted learning in the classroom to be collaborative, negotiated by those closest to learning, the students and the teacher. Yet as I listen to my thoughts, I find them directed by "I" - what "I" want, what "I" value. How is there room in a classroom for thirty "I"s? What kind of experiences would enable the expression of thirty genuine voices? What is my role as a teacher?

I have sought to understand a liberating curriculum, one that enables expression for thirty voices, where dialogue, according to Freire (1968), enables seeing the teacher-as-Subject become teacher-student and the student-as-Object become student-teacher, thus decentring both teachers and students from their traditional roles. Daignault (1989) describes curriculum as a "gap", and he thinks the gap as the

"incarnation of curriculum as composition." "Curriculum as thinking, Daignault suggests, "is always moving, diversifying ... is 'nomadic' ... curriculum does not exist, it happens" (p. 479). This understanding of curriculum allows gaps to exist that enable openings for all learners. Doll (1993), also acknowledges gaps, and suggests that a reintegration of the subject and object (initiated by Descartes' mind-body split) could change curriculum's focus to "dialoguing, negotiating, interacting". These words which indeterminacy, openness, and self-organization. They are, Doll says, "words of a transformative curriculum ... focusing on the process of ... negotiating with self and others" (p. 86).

With these desires, hopes, and concerns for new understandings of curriculum, I began to restructure my teaching practice. The restructuring was enabled through experiences and observations as an outside researcher that changed my understandings of evaluation. However, I needed to go beyond suggesting problems and alternatives. I needed to know if there were possible alternatives to the practices I was critiquing, or if the alternatives existed only in a nonexistent ideal world, in books and in my head. I was not satisfied with the theoretical writings that suggested alternatives to "thoughtless" teaching practice (Gilbert, 1989, p. 37), practice that could be improved by attending to the words of theoreticians. I was suspicious of theories presented outside of the context of a classroom. I had been, after all, a classroom teacher for fifteen years and had implemented many of the practices I was now critiquing. I did not want merely to change roles and become a theoretician suggesting "better" practices rather than a practitioner. I needed to find ways to meld the two roles, so that I could genuinely examine and reshape my own teaching practices in light of my changing beliefs and values.

My beliefs have been reconstructed as I have considered issues of evaluation from various angles and perspectives. I have been particularly concerned with evaluation used for ranking purposes, evaluation that provides information for student reports, evaluation that does not relate to students' learning. Virtually all evaluation

ranks students, I realized through my observations and discussions with teachers. Despite the rhetoric about the purposes of evaluation (correcting errors, reinforcing previous teaching, giving feedback), the main information desired by teachers and students was the ranking position of individuals within the system being scrutinized. I wanted to attempt evaluative approaches that focused elsewhere, that extended the learning processes rather than merely judging them. I wanted the power structures in the classroom to be reconfigured, to acknowledge the vitality of spirit in learning, and to consider issues of gender/race/class as they imposed frameworks upon learning.

Evaluation Brought to Life

I began my teaching year in a newly developed program, one which afforded me opportunities to structure alternative teaching and evaluating strategies. My teaching assignment for the year included, specifically, language arts and social studies (humanities), working with a class of grade eight female students and a complementary drama class to three different classes of grade seven and eight girls. I looked for approaches for communicating with my students about their learning development in ways that were individualistic, positive, supportive, and valued by the students, the administrators in the system, and the parents. I realized that there would be scepticism on the part of these interest groups as I changed the traditional "marking" system.

I began the year focusing on enabling students to make choices and expressing themselves through journals. In previous teaching experiences I had used journals in a variety of forms, and offered choices to the students. I had, through these experiences, become aware of the possibilities and dangers of perpetuating traditional teacher/student relationships despite attempts to the contrary. Students, eager to determine "what the teacher wanted" would manipulate their own journal entries to please the teacher, and make choices that assured them success in the assignments rather than pleasure or growth (Sanford-Smith, 1993). Discussion of student

writing or the contents of student portfolios, "conferencing" as it become known, offered opportunities for students to express their opinions and ask questions about their work. These too, however, became platforms for students to request high marks and for teachers to explain (defend) their assigned marks. Continuing to implement these strategies in the classroom was clearly not enough.

Rather than simply discarding the approaches I had been attempting to develop in my classrooms (reading and writing workshops, conferences, portfolios, dialogue journals) I had to reconceive learning through the eyes of the students and through my own eyes. Instead of finding ways to "motivate" my students with interesting assignments and the promise of rewards, I needed to find ways for them to develop their own voices without fear of sanction and to find ways for me to hear what they were saying. My search for alternative ways of considering evaluation opened up new vistas for me to explore with my students, vistas that encompassed attributes of "feminist" pedagogy: valuing multiple perspectives, individual voice, choice, self-acknowledgement, self-expression, and reflexivity (Allen, 1996).

Broadening the Vistas

Despite the attempts to "allow" students to express their views, make choices, take risks, explore alternative styles, it became apparent to me that the teacher still held the ultimate power to declare the students' efforts successful or failed, to open doors for future development or to close them soundly. How, then, would I be able to change the evaluation system so that students had voice in this aspect of learning as well? How would we redistribute the power held in the classroom? How would I know if changes were taking place in the classroom?

Teacher-determined evaluation generally keeps the students dependent on an "other" in order for them to develop an understanding of their progress; students rely on teacher-assigned grades to

determine their success. They cannot determine for themselves how well they have accomplished a task, because they have never had the opportunity. Students do not have the vocabulary to discuss their own performances; they do not have the understanding that a piece of writing can become separate from the person creating the writing. Rarely have teachers modelled self-assessment in the classroom; therefore, students do not have a concept of how to talk about or to feel about assessing their own work.

As the students and I developed a learning community in the classroom we needed to develop a vocabulary that enabled us to talk together in a variety of evaluative ways to continue the creating and learning processes. I began the year with an approach to evaluation that eliminated specific grades or marks. Rather, I introduced the students to three terms that would be descriptive of their work: incomplete, acceptable, and superior. I attempted to use these words in discussions of the students' work, indicating where the work was incomplete, how incomplete work was different from acceptable work, and what attributes made a piece of work superior. I developed assessment guides such as the one shown in Figures 9-2 and 9-3 that focused the students on specific attributes of their work, attempting to help them better read and evaluate their work.

Grade 8 Humanities
Poster Evaluation
HISTORICAL FICTION

Student Evaluation

Comments _____
_____
_____

Visual Clarity -	Superior	Acceptable	Incomplete
Relevant Information -	Superior	Acceptable	Incomplete
Creative/Unique Pres. -	Superior	Acceptable	Incomplete
Neatness -	Superior	Acceptable	Incomplete

Figure 9-2 Self-Assessment Sample

Regions Presentation
Assessment

Name _____ Region _____
Partners' Names _____

Assessment of my own presentation:
_____
_____
_____

The most effective presentation was _____

Describe this presentation _____
_____
_____
_____

The strengths of this presentation were
_____
_____
_____

Figure 9-3 Peer Assessment Sample

The assessment forms asked the students to consider the level of the writing being assessed (incomplete, acceptable, superior) and to give specific examples that supported their assessment.

I strugged throughout the year with establishing credibility with my students -- not as a teacher, but as a learner. I asked myself, "How should I present myself in order to create a level of genuine trust? What will enable us to break down barriers of authority and self-preservation so that we may grow together?" By revealing myself as human, showing my frailties, my passions, and my thoughts over several months, I was able (to some extent) to establish my trust-

worthiness. These attitudes were revealed through conversations that occurred randomly and spontaneously during classes, at lunch, on the way to field trips. As I was able to become more human in the students' eyes, they revealed to me some of their thoughts which allowed for mutual understandings about learning. This opening-up through conversation gave importance to dialogues; students developed sincerity in listening to advice as well as giving it. The students were able to offer advice to their colleagues and to me that was genuine and well-intended: "You need to write longer responses. Don't summarize as much." "I think your work is good, but it needs to be more carefully proofread." "There are too many spelling mistakes." "Your story is confusing and your sentences are choppy."

One aspect of the classroom routine that continued to bother me throughout the year was the practice of "conferencing" with the students. Although the intents of conferencing about student writing and assignments are valid (to give students opportunities to talk about their intentions, to get feedback from genuine readers, and to consider possibilities for further writing), often "conferences" become yet another forum for teachers to make suggestions, offer criticism and explanations for the evaluations they have deemed appropriate. There is usually a time restriction on these conferences which limits the amount of talk that can take place, and a specific agenda defined by the teacher which limits the type of talk that can take place. Conferences as I had structured them in previous classes were teacher-controlled, allowing the students to have an opportunity to hear feedback from the teacher and to defend their writing. They perpetuated, however, the power relations that had traditionally been defined by the educational system, with teacher firmly positioned as authority in the classroom. My attempts to restructure the power relations in the the classroom were not being supported by conferencing. I needed to find ways of talking with the students that enabled a different understanding of the purpose of talking about their writing. I attempted to broaden the alternatives for conferencing by enabling the students to have more openings in the conversations.

I completed my "teacher assessment" of the students' writing based on the same focus and the same criteria as the one the students were using to assess their own work. I added my assessment of the students' work after the students' self-assessment was completed in the hopes that I could avoid influencing the students' assessment of their own work.

I came to recognize that the role of outside observer (researcher) was very similar to that of the teacher continually observing her/his students. The researcher viewed the teachers, the teacher viewed the students. Each observer selected a meaning that fit into her/his personal evaluative framework or intent, creating judgments based on what has been "seen" or created. It is often difficult to "see" from perspectives different than our own, necessitating collaborative conversations to obtain more complete views of the work being offered for assessment.

After several different opportunities for self-assessment I asked the students to assess the work of a peer as well as their own work. My goal in introducing peer assessment was to extend the meaning of the terms being used for the assessments, so the students had a broader understanding of "acceptable" work or "superior" work by being able to read the other work of other students. After considering the work of their peers they could view their own work with new eyes. As the students continued with self and peer assessments I was able to see the differences between the two types. Although students became very adept at using our common vocabulary, giving examples and suggestions, they were unable to "see" with the same depth of understanding when they viewed their own work. They shaped the vocabulary to justify their work rather than to examine it critically; it was very difficult for them to view their own work "objectively". Their work was very much a part of their "selves", therefore they were examining not only their work but themselves in their entirety. I found my own comments assessing the students' work more closely resembling the peer assessments than the self-assessments. As the year progressed the students' conversations dealt more with the

content of the writing and less with comparisons between students' ranking. However, it was still very difficult for them to distinguish their writing from their "selves". As one teacher in the high school had commented, "The way we write is an expression of ourselves, it's coming out of us. It's incredibly risky to hand over a piece of writing to be examined for its weaknesses."

I continued to assess the students' writing throughout the year, interspersing my teacher assessments with students' peer and self assessments. I was able to model some of the possible responses to students' work, showing them alternative aspects to consider. Modelled responses moved the students away from standard superficial comments about theirs and others' writing, such as "good effort", "I liked the story", and (about their own writing) "I worked really hard on this story" to more specific and lengthy comments, such as, "You should try making predictions and talking about the characters in depth." "You might enjoy a more challenging book -- you could try The Giver by Lois Lowry." "Could you rewrite the first sentence -- it doesn't seem very clear to me." At all times I was wary, however, of how much I was leading the students to "give me what I wanted." Through my own comments I did not want to suggest that these were the types of responses that would please me, but rather that they were possibilities to consider. However, the students sometimes panicked about "how well they were doing" and wanted to find ways to show me they were doing well. I had to resist impulses to tell the students what I wanted, instead discussing possibilities for their writing. Although I wanted to point out incorrect structures and usages, I did not want to paralyze the students with a continual search for "correctness". I also did not want them to rely on me for the answers, but to learn ways of examining their own work. The impulses to merely tell the students what to do were strong -- remained strong -- as they have been ingrained in my teaching practice. I struggled to learn alternative approaches to discussing and assessing students' work.

Teacher-determined assessment is also much more time-efficient and I have continually struggled with my desire to complete work

quickly, control the assessment myself, and get on to a new activity. I have had to re-assess and re-value the activities that occur in a classroom and the time that is spent on them. At the beginning of the year I was instrumental in introducing activities, providing structure and a time frame. As the year progressed, the students' voices joined in the planning, as they suggested alternative activities, requested different time frames, and created new approaches. Our roles changed; the activities became more collaborative and negotiated. Throughout the year we maintained a self-selected reading program and a dialogue journal that provided a record of the students' thoughts and development. We maintained portfolios of the students' completed work in Humanities, although we soon found that the portfolios were limiting and did not accommodate large wall maps, paintings, dioramas, or sculptures. After three months, we also began a workshop approach to writing which continued to the end of the year, culminating in a class anthology. We completed the bulk of our learning as "projects", both in groups and individually. The consideration of time lessened as I saw the students' work becoming more complex and integrative. Each activity encompassed meaningful and varied learning. The work continued to be assessed, by myself and the students, using the three descriptors incomplete, acceptable, and superior.

My position of "inside" researcher has afforded me an opportunity to consider the questions of evaluation from within the classroom structure. Unlike the "outside" observer/researcher, I have been part of the context of everyday routine, able to see and understand details whose significance would otherwise have escaped me. My position has enabled me to provide opportunities for students to integrate their learning, to make connections between one area of study and another. Whereas my outside position enabled me a more distanced perspective, able to see from a variety of angles, my inside position has enabled me to more fully understand my specific classroom environment.

However, as I had come to recognize with my students, self-assessment is the most demanding challenge of evaluation and of education. My teaching lessons are reflective of me as a person .... The

same challenge applied to myself. How do I know what issues of power and communication shape students' learning in ways I am unable to see? Is it possible to make connections between public and private ideas, to place the students and teacher all as Subjects within the learning environment, and to consider future directions as well as past histories in the present moment?

10

Independence through the Mixed (Mess)ages of Evaluation

Opening Windows, Opening Doors

The main intent of this research project has been to understand evaluative aspects of teaching in ways that will enable fundamental changes to my thinking about teaching. Through focusing more directly upon evaluation as a driving force of classroom life, I have attempted to make visible what has previously remained in the shadows. Doll (1993) explores the unexamined assumption of control, gained through evaluative means, which currently operates in the modernist curriculum. The metaphor he suggests to illustrate how control has operated since the beginning of the modern era is that of a ghost which haunts the curriculum. "Control," he says, "is actually embedded in the concept of curriculum. Control is not only the ghost in the clock of curriculum -- to use the predominant modernist, mechanistic metaphor -- it is the ghost which actually runs the clock. It is time to put this ghost to rest... and to liberate curriculum to live a life of its own" (Doll in Pinar, 1995, p. 437). How, then, can we liberate ourselves from the oppressive demands of evaluation in the classroom, that insist upon comparing and ranking students and that value competitive rather than collaborative thinking?

Re-negotiating a Flexible Evaluative Structure

One of the first changes I instituted in my classroom evaluation was to move away from using percentage or any other form of numerical grade and instead to use descriptors for levels of performance. Letter grades -- A, B, C, D, F -- were required by the school administrative system for reporting to parents at the end of each term, but that was the only time the students and I considered a fixed grade that could compare one student to another. Other than report card reporting, we discussed the students' work in terms of incomplete, acceptable, or superior attempts. The students, I realized, relied upon me to "fix" or

place their work in a particular category, so quickly I made other changes to my practice. I attempted to make both a place and a space in the course of the day for students to hold conversations and discussions, both with other students and with me, conversations that were both process-oriented and evaluation-oriented. I attempted to give more attention to words I chose to use and I decided to use the word "assess" rather than any of the other commonly used evaluative words (mark, grade, evaluate). I used the word "assessment" as an approximation, a shifting set of focusing questions that emphasized the students' learning attempts rather than a hierarchical "placing" in the classroom of best to worst. Along with the choice of the word "assessment" came the prefix descriptors of the word -- peer, self, teacher, parent -- in an attempt to suggest that assessment is part of the learning process and that it involves all of the learners. Rather than assessment being controlled by the teacher, it can become part of the thinking of all members of the classroom. I attempted to shift the authority and evaluative role from the teacher to the students themselves.

The more that self- and peer-assessment became part of the classroom activity, the more time it took. Students worked in pairs, in groups, or independently to discuss and consider their own work and the work of their classmates. Some of the teacher time that had traditionally been spent grading and evaluating outside of class time was now being spent in the classroom. I had to carefully consider what was important and where time should be spent. I also had to continually question and assess my own comments about the students' work. Modelling was an important part of the learning process and I was made aware of the importance of the words I spoke as well as the words I did not speak.

The types of activities in which the students were engaged also became of critical importance as we reconsidered student evaluation practices. Used to relying on the word of the teacher to understand their own "value", the students had little confidence in their ability to select texts to read and write. They were initially fearful and angry that

choices were theirs to make. They made comments such as, "I have nothing to write about," and "This is dumb." Finding and expressing voice was initially very difficult for the students. However, through a variety of writing and reading projects early in the year, the students had opportunities to value their own ideas and histories, to explore and to write in non-judgmental environments. Autobiographical and journal writing enabled them to explore their own ideas and feelings without being judged or censured. They were given opportunities to ask for assessments rather than having evaluation continually imposed upon them.

Although I was committed to adapting and changing my teaching practices and continually re-examining my assumptions with the help of my students and colleagues, I was also aware that within the classroom it was important to maintain a framework that the students understood. I could not change established routines and practices on a whim but must keep the needs of my students for a consistent and dependable framework in mind. The classroom structure that was established early in the year and maintained throughout consisted of an initial half-hour block in which the students read self-selected materials and responded in dialogue journals, followed by an hour block in which they developed and researched projects from both the language arts and social studies areas. The projects themselves were developed around curricular concerns. They took on many forms and incorporated both independent and group skills. The students interviewed, read, created posters and presentations, listened to speakers, viewed videos, searched through magazines and newspapers, used computers. Throughout the year they became more readily able to locate sources and make connections for themselves between their ideas and between curricular areas.

The students, when they were in the classroom, sat at tables or desks clustered in groups of four. Although this created many opportunities for conversation among the students and often caused me irritation, this classroom organization was maintained throughout the year. I wanted to establish a positive view of conversation that

would pervade all of our classroom work and often the conversation was productive. Another important aspect of my teaching, although not of my creating, was that all of my students were girls, in a program that accommodated only girls. This feature of the classroom in itself suggested possibilities for conversation that could have different textures, nuances and contents from a co-educational setting. The lack of pressures that existed due to adolescent interests of male-female socialization and culture created space in which the students were free to explore and to develop personal voice.

Classroom Activities to Support Theoretical Understandings

The two activities in which we engaged at the beginning of the year were the self-selected reading program (including a dialogue journal) and an assignment in which the students were to write a biography of one of their classmates. Both of these activities included various forms of talk such as interviewing, checking for information, sharing stories, posing questions, and musing aloud. Students were encouraged to talk to each other and to share their ideas in both oral and written form. The sharing aspect of the classroom became more and more important as the year progressed. Students at first needed to be urged to share their work but gradually came to value the opportunity to read their colleagues' work and respond to it.

The biography assignment provided an early opportunity to share ideas and writing. I randomly paired up the students. (As this was the beginning of the school year and a newly created school, very few of the students knew each other and I knew none of them). They were to develop interview questions that they could pose to their partners in order to find information about their lives, enough information to write a biography. The students then switched positions and became interviewed by their partner. This required a considerable amount of conversation, both in the initial interview questions and in follow-up conversations where they were able to expand and complement the initial information.

An aspect of the sharing was, of course, evaluative. Once the biographies were completed, the students were asked to assess the biography that had been written about them as well as their own written work. Students formed judgments as they read each others' writing and struggled to express their ideas and opinions in productive ways. Initially I provided formats (assessment sheets) such as the one shown in figure 10-1 for the students to complete.

Grade 8 Humanities

Biography #2

Teacher Assessment

Completeness of Information - key elements in the person's life are included

Superior **Acceptable** **Incomplete**

Written Expression - clear, good word choice, smooth sentence structure, unique style

Superior **Acceptable** **Incomplete**

Format of Biography - unique, fits the content, enhances the information

Superior **Acceptable** **Incomplete**

Visual Presentation - pleasing to the eye, neat, correct spelling, etc., effective title page

Superior **Acceptable** **Incomplete**

Figure 10-1 Sample Assessment Form

This type of assessment, while being somewhat restrictive, offered the students a focus for their evaluative reading and comments. It also gave me an opportunity to model various types of responses to students' work, as they read the teacher assessment as well as the peer- and self-assessment sheets. I was encouraged to respond in ways that would both help the students consider their own work as well as consider the types of responses they could give to their peers in future work. The students needed to develop a vocabulary that would not merely rank students' work (good, excellent, messy) but would also enable them to articulate what made the work of a particular quality, and (from a reader's perspective), the aspects to consider for future writing. The ability to

articulate was valuable not only for the student who was receiving the comments, but also for the student giving the comments. In addition, the development of a common language and vocabulary for discussing each others' work enabled a community of learners to develop. I began to withhold my own assessment until the others had been completed. It was my hope that the students would become less restricted by my comments if they were able to express their own ideas first without the shadow of my "teacher" comments being imposed.

As with the biography assignment, I provided an assessment sheet for the dialogue journals, shown in Figure 10-2. The students wrote daily entries about their reading in their journals. The only "rule" I imposed was that the entries be a minimum of one-half page in length. We discussed possible directions for the journal entries, and together came up with a short collection of possibilities. The list of possible responses was made into a poster and displayed on the bulletin board for the students' reference. However, they knew that they were in no way obliged to use the list if they had other ideas and many students never used it.

Dialogue Journal Responses ....

- discuss the title, cover of the book
- relate the story to personal experiences
- predictions; what will happen next ...
- personal reactions and feelings about the story
- relating to characters
- clarifying meanings (words, ideas, plot development, etc.)
- discussing language, style, and form of writing
- questions about character motivation
- discuss type of genres

Figure10-2 Possible Dialogue Journal Response List Generated by Students

I collected the students' dialogue journals every second week to read and respond to their ideas. I would jot comments in the margins, on the backs of pages, or wherever else there was room to write a comment. The nature of these comments was not intended to be evaluative in any way, but often took the form of questions, connections to other books, personal rememberings, or suggestions for possibilities to consider in future journal entries. I endeavoured to develop a written conversation through my comments, and students sometimes extended the conversation by responding to my comments. I attempted to keep the evaluative comments completely separate from the conversational comments, and devised a brief form that was stapled to the final page of dialogue journal responses, as seen in Figure 10-3. This slip of coloured paper provided an easily visible marker between the times the journals had been collected. The students were easily able to refer back to previous sections or comments to track their progress and to follow up on suggestions that had been given to them.

As a component of the evaluative processes in the classroom, I attempted to initiate conferences between the student and me dealing with the student's writing. In preparation for the first report card, I scheduled a meeting with each of the students to discuss the contents of their portfolios. I had planned to spend about ten minutes "conferencing" with each of the students, using a format similar to the one suggested by Nancie Atwell (1988):

> What does someone have to do in order to be a good writer?
> What's your best piece of writing this term?
> What makes it best?
> I notice you made this change in content in this piece of writing. Would you be willing to change it back to the way you first wrote it? Why or why not?
> What are your goals for the next term? (What do you want to try to do as a writer?) (p. 240)

Dialogue Journal

Date _____

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Superior Acceptable Incomplete

Figure 10-3 Dialogue Journal Assessment Sheet

As in past experiences with conferencing, I felt frustrated by the process. Perhaps because the conferences were scheduled before the report card in an attempt to collaboratively develop a mark with the students, the focus became the assessment that would appear on their report cards. They spoke candidly about their feelings in connection to their efforts and results until I asked them to suggest a fair assessment for their term's work (in the form of a letter grade). At that point in the conference the students tended to put on their rose-coloured glasses and extol their own virtues as well as the virtues of their work. The students usually suggested a grade that was high, often based on desire rather than the quality of their work. The conversation would then shift to focus on defending their selected grade because of their efforts. I would often disagree, attempt to explain why their grade would not be as high as the one they suggested, and then, as we both left the conference disgruntled, wonder why I had asked them in the first place.

Outsider Perspectives

As I became immersed in my classroom life, I found that I needed an "outsider" voice to bring alternative perspectives and balance to my understanding. As with my research of the previous year, I wanted to incorporate ways of checking my perceptions, gaining insights and ideas that I may not have perceived on my own. Early in the year I invited a university colleague to visit my classroom to observe/participate in the class activities, to give me "feedback" about those observations, and to talk to the students. The feedback I received, although not always affirming of my beliefs or practices, enabled me to better understand my students' perspectives and concerns, enabled me to keep open the gaps in which questions could develop, and to relate my own experiences to those of the teachers I worked with the previous year.

The students shared some of their feelings with the researcher from the university whom I had asked to join the class. The researcher's questions to the students focused on the assessment procedures used in the class. He initially asked, "What is the difference between assessment and evaluation?" and one student responded, "Evaluation is when you just look at [the work] and assessment you look at it and figure out how to do it." Two students then offered their opinions that "assessment is better because you have a say in it" and another countered with, "But she [the teacher] always grades you lower that we grade ourselves." Even though the students were being asked to express their views and opinions, the final result was the same -- those with the power had the final word.

I left the first set of conferences feeling discouraged by the process, questioning its usefulness in contributing to either the learning or the evaluation processes. My initial reaction to the conferences was that the students were only concerned with being awarded a high grade, to please themselves and their parents. They had no concern for connections between grades and their work, between assessment and learning. I felt annoyed. They had, I felt, considerable audacity questioning my

judgment. However, after reading the university researcher's notes and thinking about my expectations and assumptions, I was given cause to reflect. The students seemed to value the opportunity to talk about their progress, but at the same time they could see where the power lay and feel frustration about being powerless within the system. Thinking back over the day's conferences, I began to realize how difficult it was for the students to separate their work from their "selves"; by criticizing their work, they were criticizing themselves. I also began to realize the ongoing need for my students and myself to develop a vocabulary through which we could talk about our progress and development. I recognized the need to develop a different structure for talking and negotiation with my students, and reflected on several other comments the university researcher had noted:

> Daria: I think we should be marking ourselves. Students should do it. It's our work, we know if we can do it better.
>
> Tamara: Yea, but you would just give yourself A's, I mean high marks or whatever.
>
> Daria: No I wouldn't. I am honest. You don't know.
>
> Tamara: Sure. (pause) Not everybody would.
>
> Daria: I thought my original work was bad, gave myself incompletes, and I think it's worse now.
>
> Researcher: Maybe in time Ms. Sanford will do that, when you all can do it honestly.
>
> Daria: Tell her that. I think we should. After all, we know if we want to do it better.

I recognized that I had not given the students enough credit for genuine interest in their learning. I had not considered the societal pressures that were bearing down upon the students. If talk was going to genuinely be part of the learning process how, then, could conferences be reconceived in our classroom?

Rather than have conferences seen as formal processes linked to report card grades, I decided to structure conferences in more informal ways. I would "chat" with students on a regular basis, during times when the class was otherwise occupied. The focus of conferences would not be on evaluation, and would not be led or controlled by the teacher. The students would have equal "authority" in the content and direction of the conference. I also determined to term our meetings "conversations" rather than "conferences", attempting to balance the power and control within the conversation, making it a genuine sharing of ideas and suggestions rather than a teacher-directed discussion of how and where the student could improve.

In an attempt to further open the conversation about learning and evaluation, I invited the parents to participate in the assessment as well. A second biography project involved the students selecting a female of a different generation (family or friend) to become the subject of their writing. The students were required to collect information through interview, conversation, and researching documents and then to write the biography as if it was an autobiography, thus also examining the issue of perspective. If possible, the students asked the subject of the biography to complete an assessment on the project, or if the subject was not available they asked a parent. By involving parents in the assessment process, I was hoping to introduce a greater level of understanding and collaboration.

A final biography project was an autobiography. Students by this time had remembered a great deal of their lives through talking about others, often specific and minute details. These memories enriched their writing and enabled them to better appreciate their own stories. I was attempting to help the students value their own lives and stories as well as to make connections between themselves and others. Through their research and their writing the students came to know themselves and their classmates and to value their own families' stories and the stories of their classmates.

The students had not been receiving percentage or letter grades for their assignments throughout the term, and had sometimes expressed concern about the "new" marking system. They were unsure of their progress without a number telling them how they were doing. Some of the students (and their parents) perceived that they would be doing better than "acceptable" if they were receiving number grades. One student commented, "I'd prefer a number. We have always had numbers. You know how you are doing." Another student said, "The assessment process is good, but last year I was getting 70s and this year I seem to be getting 50s." When she was asked how she knew she was getting 50s, she shrugged her shoulders. The students' attachment to numbers suggested to me that the parents would share their attachment. Therefore, I tried to prepare them for the report card assessments with the letter in Figure 10-4.

There was some confusion expressed by the parents at the parent-teacher conferences. They were unsure how a level of Acceptable equated to a percentage grade, or if their child was working at an "honours" level. Some parents were uncomfortable with change but most were content after an opportunity to talk about their concerns. Their concerns consisted of a fear that they would not be able to understand their child's progress and that the students would not "do as well" in relation to the larger school system. The students themselves adopted the new terminology (Incomplete, Acceptable, Superior) quite readily, but understanding this different approach to evaluation was more difficult. Throughout the year they continued to attempt to understand their work in relation to a ranking system. "Is this a "B"?" they would ask, relating

November 16, 1995

Dear Parent/Guardian;

re: Student Assessment
Grade 8 Humanities

Assessment is an integral aspect of learning. In our Grade 8 Humanities course, the students are becoming involved in their own assessment in order to better understand and articulate their growth and development. They are also better able to understand the processes required to develop a completed product, and the processes required for each project or presentation.

The portfolio approach to assessment used in our class involves the students in ways that draw on feminist principles and beliefs -- development of individual and collective voices, choice, integration and connection, and multiple assessments.

In order to support this approach to assessment, students are involved in assessing their completed work based on the criteria **Incomplete, Acceptable**, or **Superior**. They are involved in assessing their own work and are assessed by their peers, their teacher, and sometimes you, their parents. An **Incomplete** assessment indicates that the work has not been completed to the level specified; **Acceptable** indicates that the students are working at an acceptable level for grade eight. **Superior** indicates work that shows effort, thought, and detail beyond the normally expected level for grade eight.

In order for the students and parents to interpret these levels of achievement, **Superior** work equates to a grade of "A", **Acceptable** equates to a "C", an equal balance of **Acceptable** and **Superior** work equates to a "B". A portfolio that shows work consistently **Incomplete** will be assessed a grade of "D".

My intent in using this approach to assessment is that the students will become independent learners and thinkers, able to assess and further develop their own work.

Yours truly,

Kathy Sanford-Smith
Grade 8 Humanities Teacher

Figure 10-4 Letter to Parents Explaining Assessment Process

each piece of work to a significant aspect of their report card mark. One student related a story to me, "Yesterday my mom told me that if I get straight A's on my final report card I can go to New York. What do I have to do to get an 'A' in Humanities? I think my work has really been improving this year, don't you?" With one brief remark from her parent, the student had been brought right back into a traditional way of thinking about her evaluation, relying on someone with authority to rank her, to place her in a specific category and to grant or withhold a reward (indirectly).

Throughout the year the students and I brought many issues and concerns to the classroom for discussion. We attempted to make ourselves present in history and to define ourselves as active authors of our own worlds -- to develop our voices. "Voice," suggests Weiler, "represents those multiple subjectivities, discourses, and biographies that constitute teachers and students alike within relations of power, history, and experience" (1988, p.xi). Initially the students would make suggestions in circuitous ways, by telling the researcher what they thought or writing notes in their dialogue journals. As our relationship developed, however, the students became much less reticent about expressing their ideas and about negotiating projects. Although I had always been open to suggestions from students, they had never been as expressive -- not really caring about the work assigned, I thought. As they spoke more openly I realized the depth of their caring as well as the depth of their insights and abilities. They were interested in ideas and how they could be presented. They were also interested in the room arrangement and the displays. They assumed responsibility for decorating the room with their work and began using the blackboards to share poems, quotes, and other ideas. Weiler (1988) suggests, "As a referent for empowerment, the category of voice interrogates the processes through which identities are ignored, constructed, or experienced; meanings are affirmed, marginalized, or questioned; and experiences are formed within the interlocking and related processes of subjugation, affirmation, and enlightenment" (p. xii). The voices of the students gained strength and control; they were confident in providing harmonic balance rather than demanding to dominate or willing to be overpowered and hidden. There

was less asking for permission within the classroom talk and more offering of suggestions and ideas.

Broadening Concepts of Testing and Examinations

The concept of "tests" and "exams" recurred during the year. The students wanted to know if there were going to be any. They had all become accustomed to exams in previous years -- to tell them "how they were doing", to tell them what they knew. They were used to exams that controlled their thinking and their behaviour. I thought it would be a worthwhile venture to broaden the concept of "examination" for the students.

The first examination experience involved the students' reading program. I asked the students to re-read their journal entries from the beginning of the year and then they completed the "Examination of Reading" reproduced as Figure 10-5.

The length of responses varied, but averaged one to two pages of discussion about the student's personal reading habits and developments. The following is an example of a response:

I think that my reading habits have changed over the course of a year. I have varied my reading much more than ever before which has made me think a lot more. The beginning of the year was just usually picking out a book for the sake of reading it but now I am trying to pick books that I think will challenge me because I find them much more fun. I also like books that are more original because otherwise it gets to boring with the basicly same plot.

Where you choose to read and understanding what you read are tied together for me. You must choose a place where you can't be bothered or where you won't let yourself be bothered. If I don't do that no matter what I'm reading I won't understand it which is why I read at school, before going to bed and on the weekends in my favourite chair when it is quiet. These have worked out to what they are as I read more and better books. The improvement has come slowly but at least has come.

I am also reading a lot more than from the beginning of the year. Before it might have taken me a week to read a one hundred page book now it only takes me a few days.

Grade 8 Humanities

Examination of Reading

You have already re-read your dialogue journals. Use the ideas you got while you were re-reading, as well as any that come to you now.

1) Discuss your reading habits during this year. In relation to your a) types of reading, b) amount of reading, c) place of reading, and d) understanding of reading, do you see any changes to your reading habits?

If so, describe them in relation to the four points mentioned above.
If not, discuss why you have not changed in any of the four points mentioned above.

2) What change(s) do you think it would be desirable to make to your reading habits? Tell **why** you think so, in as much detail as possible.

Figure 10-5 Examination of Reading

I could improve by spending extra time I have reading instead of watching television or doing something with no purpose. These are quiet times in my room and I could use them. I don't think I would really mind but I have to push myself to get there.

One of the problems I encounter is, when I go to the library, I usually can't find an interesting book for my reading level. The young adults is too young and the adults is so varied I don't know what would be good. The classics are good but after while you can get used to them.

Other students commented on the amount of reading they had done (they referred to the table of contents in their dialogue journals where they had recorded their reading throughout the year -- "This year I have moved up in my level of reading, from R.L. Stine to books like The Celestine Prophecies."), their growing enjoyment of reading ("It really does make reading easier if you like it."; "The more interested I am in the book helps speed up how quickly I read it."), and the different types of

reading they were doing. They also commented on some of their difficulties, such as finding comfortable reading spaces (the classroom was not comfortable -- "I read in my room at home because that's the only place where my brother and sister aren't."), and some of the difficulties they had with reading and with understanding their reading ("Because I am a slow reader I can't read as many books as I would like but I do read every night for at least an hour and also at school in class."). They commented on reading strategies they had developed ("Some times it's better to read slower because you have more time to think about what you're reading and understand it better." "If you have trouble looking for new types of books, what you should do before you start a book is read a couple of pages from the middle to see if you like it.") and books they would recommend to others.

The "examination of reading" was assessed by peer comments. I then read each of the responses and the peer comments. The contents of the responses and the comments gave fuel to many conversations in the class, and offered me insights through which I could guide students in future reading experiences. Comments were often written in the form of a friendly letter, and showed an engagement with the ideas that had been presented and conversation between two readers. The following example is the assessment comments to the previous response:

Dear Chloe,

I think that your reading level is of a mature and adult way. It's good to have an open mind about books. I feel that you do. But one thing you should do is to read books that are more for your age. Good, funny books are what everyone needs, and your response sounds as if you only read non-fiction, 100% real books. You should have tried to talk more about #2 question. I don't think that you told enough about that. You gave an excellent response to #1[see exam example figure 10-5]*, full, easy to understand, and complete. You sound as though your reading skills have improved a lot since the beginning of the year and your confident about that and the books you read. Good job, Chloe!*

From,
Alicia

Through this examination of reading the students were recognizing their own ideas as legitimate text for further discussion. They became more aware of their reading abilities and concerns, and were also able to give thoughtful and useful feedback to their peers. I was also able to gain valuable insights from the peer responses.

A second examination that I developed for the students was in response to the social studies aspect of the Humanities curriculum. We had spent several weeks investigating the regions of North America and the students had taken turns teaching each other about the regions. They wanted an opportunity to prove to themselves that they had "learned" something and repeatedly asked when the test would be coming. I decided that it would be a good idea to give them an opportunity to demonstrate their learning and their thinking abilities, but cautioned the students that there would be no need to memorize specific facts and figures, and that they would be able to use their texts and their notebooks to complete the "test". Before they wrote the test, we talked about what constituted important learning and what made it important, from my perspective and from their perspectives. The students had as much time as they needed to complete the following questions, and most students worked for at least two hours.

Once the "tests" had been completed, I collected them, read through the responses, and wrote comments and questions on all but the first question. I then returned the test to the students and had them help me assess the responses to the first question. They assessed their own work, and were astounded to recognize that there was more than one answer to the questions. After the students had been given an opportunity to read through their answers again and examine my comments, we had individual conversations about the nature of their learning. It was relatively clear to the students and to myself which students had developed an understanding of the concepts and which students still

Humanities Grade 8
Regions of North America

1. Examine the eleven pictures on the back of your textbook. Identify a possible region in which each of these pictures is located, and give three features that support your choice for each picture.

2. Identify two cultural groups that have had a major impact on the development of North America. What region(s) have they influenced? Give several ways that they have influenced the region. Be as detailed as you can.

3. What region did you study in depth?
Give at least two unique features of this region and discuss why these features have been influential to the rest of the North American continent.

4. Refer to the map on the inside cover of your textbook.

a) Identify two major waterways found in North America. Locate these waterways by using approximate longitude and latitudes. Give a name to each of these waterways. Give a reason why each of these would be considered a major waterway.
b) Identify a low, flat area of the continent. How does this influence the lifestyle of the people living there?
c) Identify a region that has an extensive history. Suggest how the history has been influenced by the climatic conditions of the region. How has the history affected the development of the region?

Figure 10-6 Humanities Examination

struggled to make sense of the material. Through conversation we could determine the further needs and directions of each of them and for the class as a whole. The conversations directed my future units of study, helping me decide what and how to introduce into the classroom.

The final "examination", the one that would assess not only the students' abilities to learn but also my abilities to teach was the "Highest Level of Achievement Test", an externally developed examination given commonly throughout the school system. This exam consisted of two parts, one multiple choice test of reading skills, and one writing test. This test would compare my students with thousands of other students in their abilities to read and write. As the students had not written these types of "tests" in my class during the year, I panicked a bit and determined that they needed a discussion on how to write tests. However, during the course of the discussion I realized my mistake. The students had written numerous tests of similar types throughout their school careers, as well as several in other classes during the current year. They were test-wise and had already been amply prepared in that area.

The tests were written, the results determined. There were a few students who scored poorly on the test. However, these students were the same ones who had been earlier identified (and identified themselves) through their dialogue journals and other assignments as struggling learners. Most of the students handled the test in an acceptable or superior way. Two students scored below acceptable grade standards, ten scored at acceptable grade standards, and thirteen scored above grade level. This was a relief to both the students and to the teacher. What had made us doubt? I knew that the students were learning throughout the year, developing and growing in their thinking and their writing. What, then, made us fearful after a year's work?

Examining and Refocusing the Snapshot Classroom Views

I have spent a year teaching in a classroom, attempting to re-negotiate the classroom experiences through reexamination of evaluative processes. I have continually examined understandings of classroom evaluation (mine and others) in an attempt to re-configure the classroom. Continual questioning of definitions of words such as "learning", "assessing", and "teaching" have opened up gaps in which to struggle and to speak. Questioning restrictive and ambiguous words such

as "excellence" and "accountability" give more opportunity for the struggles. Redefinition of words has enabled the students and me to more clearly articulate our ideas and our concerns. We have developed a common vocabulary that allows for exploration, extension, and connection of our thoughts. Through our ever-expanding vocabulary we create closer and more personal relationships, relationships in which we care to listen to each other speak, desire to hear. We have developed a playfulness in conversations that enables us to leap joyously for ideas, with a lessened sense of fear, censure, judgment, and humiliation.

Our developing conversations have also given us words through which we can understand multiple perspectives and hear multiple voices speaking. We have listened with more attuned ears to conversations of difference, respectful of the experiences of others. We have spoken of the perspectives of learning, of teaching, of researching. We have recognized that these perspectives are part of each one of us. Our conversations have been filled with silences as well as words, gaps that allow individual voices to be heard. We have heard through our conversations the value of questions as well as the value of answers.

I have come to understand, to value, and to seek the richness that exists in a classroom as I have continued to relinquish my control, overcome my fears, and reshape the power that exists between us. The changes have been gradual. We have continued to have attacks of panic, grasping for any recognizable hold to traditional evaluative practices. The students wanted tests and end-of-chapter questions. I wanted a row of average-able numbers listed neatly after a student's name on a "mark sheet". But our moments of panic lessened as we talked together and recognized the strengths that emerged between and around us.

I have now turned to a new year, with possibilities to continue conversations begun in previous months. I consider changes to be made based on last year's learning. For example, I realize that the evaluative words I imposed at the beginning of the year (incomplete, acceptable, superior) have distinctive meanings to me, but perhaps less complete or different meanings for the students. I plan to begin with a conversation

of the meanings of the words we select to indicate our educational development. I plan to develop different ways of talking about our educational conversations, avoiding the word "conference" and the connotations that have developed with the word. However, I cannot plan in isolation. Multiple voices exist in my classroom; multiple voices must be part of the planning process. I cannot say how the year will evolve, only that it will grow through spoken and unspoken conversations.

11

Untangling the Mixed Messages of Evaluation

"Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). My research project has led me on journeys and into layers I had previously not examined or considered. I have become the "tramp of the obvious" referred to by Freire (1985), looking and looking again at beliefs and practices connected to evaluation of students' written expression. Through consideration of our own beliefs and practices as students and teachers, I have realized "how important the obvious becomes as the object of our critical reflection, and .... I have discovered that the obvious is not always as obvious as it appears" (p. 171). Throughout the research project I have come to understand the complexities involved in issues of evaluation.

The experiences that have formed the framework of this research have been diverse and ongoing. I began my research quest many years ago with negative experiences of evaluation that have shaped each of my future experiences and encounters and given me a frame of reference through which to construct my teacher self. As an inexperienced teacher I felt in danger of being swept away in a tidal wave of evaluative power, and was unable to find the strength of authority or experience to directly face the onslaught. I retreated to a teaching space that was protective and safe. Throughout my teaching/researching career, I have attempted to recover a position in which I could understand and confront these oppressive and overwhelming forces. However, experience does not simply go on inside a person, and every experience in some way shapes the conditions under which the experiences are had. The experiences of evaluation that I have written have been reflexively created through hundreds of encounters between myself and other people. These encounters have enabled me to create a vision of alternative approaches to evaluation that can be incorporated into classroom situations. Marx wrote,

> One must not only interpret the world but one must change it. Indeed, interpretation without intention of change is empty; change without interpretation is blind. Interpretation and change, theory and practice, are not two separate factors which can be combined; they are interrelated in such a way that knowledge becomes fertilized by practice and practice is guided by knowledge; theory and practice both change their nature once they cease to be separate. (in Fromm, 1968, p.173)

Dewey has suggested two principles of experience -- continuity and interaction -- that provide the longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience. The longitudinal aspects provide fluidity of melodies that flow from moment to moment, giving action and direction to our experiences. The lateral aspects provide intensity and richness of layers that make experience profound and meaningful. In this research, my autobiographical melody provides the movement of a narrative tale while the layers of voices provide rich and sonorous foundations for my research. The context of my research story includes melodic and harmonic elements but also silences, both intentional and random. What is written and what is not written in this dissertation reflects the autopoiesis of the research (Maturana and Varela, 1980), both the purposefulness and the unpredictability, leaving the reader to give personal meaning to the melodies of words and the silences of non-words.

My research story began with a memory -- an inexperienced teacher beseiged with unknowns but excited by the possibilities of working with promising students and interesting ideas. A second memory followed -- a fearful inexperienced teacher assailed by negative evaluations, reeling from the force of these evaluations upon her "self", yet unable to respond and unaware of the effects. The collection of memories grew, colliding and reverberating. In an attempt to understand this re-collection I began to consciously replay them in my mind, and I began to recognize recurring events and responses to these events. The memories clustered as if I was creating a collage. In the apparent randomness of the collage

there appeared themes and variations on the themes, recognizable yet continually changing.

Consideration of these focal memories and events again broadened my understanding as I gathered information through multiple sources, layering and reconfiguring. I continued to remember and to act; I began to recognize common aspects of focus in each of the previous memories, aspects which consistently reappeared like threads woven throughout a fabric. The threads that have connected the sections of this research patchwork are the questions with which I began my research investigation, questions that have recurred throughout the broad and narrowed perspectives of my research.

* How can we as teachers come to better understand our purposes, both implicit and explicit, in writing comments on our students' work, and the influence that our comments have on our students' future development of skills and attitudes?
* How can we develop evaluative practices that best enable us to guide our students to clearer understandings about reading, writing, and learning?
* What is the influence and impact on students of their teachers' responses to their writing?

My recent classroom implementations of evaluative practices have been a result of the understandings I gained while working with five high school teachers throughout the course of a year to investigate these questions, juxtaposed with my own teaching and learning experiences. I have attempted to determine whether it is possible to make changes to evaluative processes not only in a written research project but also in the "reality" of a classroom setting. Following my research with high school teachers, I have been working with an alternative assessment approach for over a year as a junior high school teacher in a classroom context and have been convinced that alternatives are indeed viable.

In preparation for completing first term report cards, I distributed a sheet of paper to each student showing the projects we had completed in the term and the assessment that had been assigned collectively (by the student

herself, her peers, and the teacher) to the work. The assessment sheet helped the students to review their learning for the term and reminded them of the assessments they had helped determine for each completed piece of work. Their task was to consider their work to date and to suggest a grade that they believed indicated their overall level of performance for the term (A, B, C, D).

Angie received her assessment sheet and examined it carefully. Although always a strong student, Angie's work this year showed a new level of maturity. Her assessment levels reflected this maturity and each piece of work had reached a level of superior except one. An essay assignment had not reached a superior level, and Angie asked if she could re-do the essay. I replied that she could, but that for "grade" purposes it was not necessary. I suggested to her that she had already attained an "A" standing.

However, the next day I received a thoroughly revised and edited essay -- this time completed on the word processor rather than hand written. It had been considerably extended, the ideas were more fully developed, and the conclusion had changed to show new thinking about the issue. Angie had chosen to take time to improve her work, not for the teacher, not for the grade, but for herself.

This story exemplifies the possibilites for an approach to assessment that seeks opportunities to make ethical responses, to recognize the person of the student being assessed. An assessment approach that respects and values the desires of the students as people gives space to recognize that it is their desires which make them unique. "Many teachers," notes Odell, "are trying to provide more and more occasions for writers to receive responses to their drafts, responses not just from the teacher but from other students as well (1989, p. 221). The approach to assessment that I have attempted to shape offers opportunities for students to write and to share their writing frequently in non-judging situations. Students are acknowledged as unique and thoughtful, capable of creating and voicing their ideas and opinions.

Through an alternative understanding of assessment my students and I have openly acknowledged the important force of evaluation and

have attempted to redefine this forceful power source in positive terms. We have, through collaboration and conversation, discovered power from within and around us, recognizing "self" and "other" as well as the "other" of "self". The authentic relationship with other, suggests Levinas (1979), "is discourse and more exactly, response or responsibility" (p.88). Discourse enables multiple voices to exist simultaneously. The acknowledgement of multiple versions of self has opened spaces in which many voices might sound. Through reversing binaries, privileging what has previously not been privileged, we are able to acknowledge the "value" of all students.

"Let's do as little ranking and grading as we can," suggests Peter Elbow (1993, p. 205). "They are never fair and they undermine learning and teaching." I have attempted, while addressing my initial research questions, to indicate the impact that teachers' comments have on students' future writing and thinking attempts when the evaluation is done for the purposes of ranking and grading. If indeed, as Moffett (1979) suggests, evaluation is intended to give feedback to the students, we need to explore possibilities that enable us to go beyond ranking and grading.

My research ends at the beginning -- the beginning of possibilities for awareness of each other and of self. My awareness has begun to include issues of equity, to consider how people of difference (e.g., gender/class/race) fare with current evaluative approaches, and how alternatives to traditional evaluation situations can affect the voices of people of difference. I am advocating a major re-vision of the role of assessment and evaluation in classrooms, a role which acknowledges the importance of relationship between the students and the teacher. "If we want to find less constrained and constraining ways of responding as writing teachers, we have to examine our responses within the contexts of the relationships in which they occur (Tobin, 1991, p. 347). We as teachers need to value the relationships with our students and to make opportunities to not just listen but to actually hear their voices.

In this writing I have attempted to learn from the many voices that have participated in my learning. As I conclude and re-view the sections

making up the whole of my dissertation I recognize the importance of my previous learnings. An engagement with the issues of evaluation has required my understanding of reading/listening and writing/speaking processes and the connections between them. It has been important for me to consider the roles played by teachers as readers/evaluators and as writers/evaluators, as well as to consider the other roles possible for teachers as readers and teachers as writers. It has been the desire to find alternative roles for teachers and students and to untangle the threads of roles we play that has led me on this research quest.

My re-readings of this text have better enabled me to understand my journey as an educator and to more thoughtfully weave webs that help to unite ideas rather than to further tangle our clutters of thoughts. I am more able to understand the direction toward which I will continue to focus my energies. My understandings as a result of my research have led me to offer several recommendations for further study: 1) we as teachers need to find ways to question and understand a more complex notion of the "self", to recognize our own beliefs and motivations within discourses of educational imaginary in order to more articulately direct our future beliefs and actions; 2) we need to consider ways to examine the nature of our relationships with students, relationships that we have traditionally constrained through imposed evaluation; 3) we need to make conscious attempts to find life experiences that will enable the melding of theory and practice, and to take responsibility for acting upon our increased understanding; 4) we must question the notion of "accountability" and find ways to honour "self" so that we are not dominated by the "system"; and 5) we must work to better understand the concepts of choice, voice, and multiplicity of roles within discourses of evaluation. I offer these recommendations with hope and respect, in recognition of the promise of the many voices we are, collectively and individually.

I have been here before
I think
objects blurring past me
If only I could slow down
I recognize ... no, maybe not...
but that shape seems very
familiar to me

No, wait, that was --
I remember her now
She shared a poem with me,
she cried....

The objects take on faces
yes, I recognize him --
he ran like the wind
he sang his songs
she painted a poster
she gave me a flower

The world slows down ...
I pass by as they pass by me

I have been here before
but it was not the same

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